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THE GOLDEN SKULL

By JOHN BLAINE

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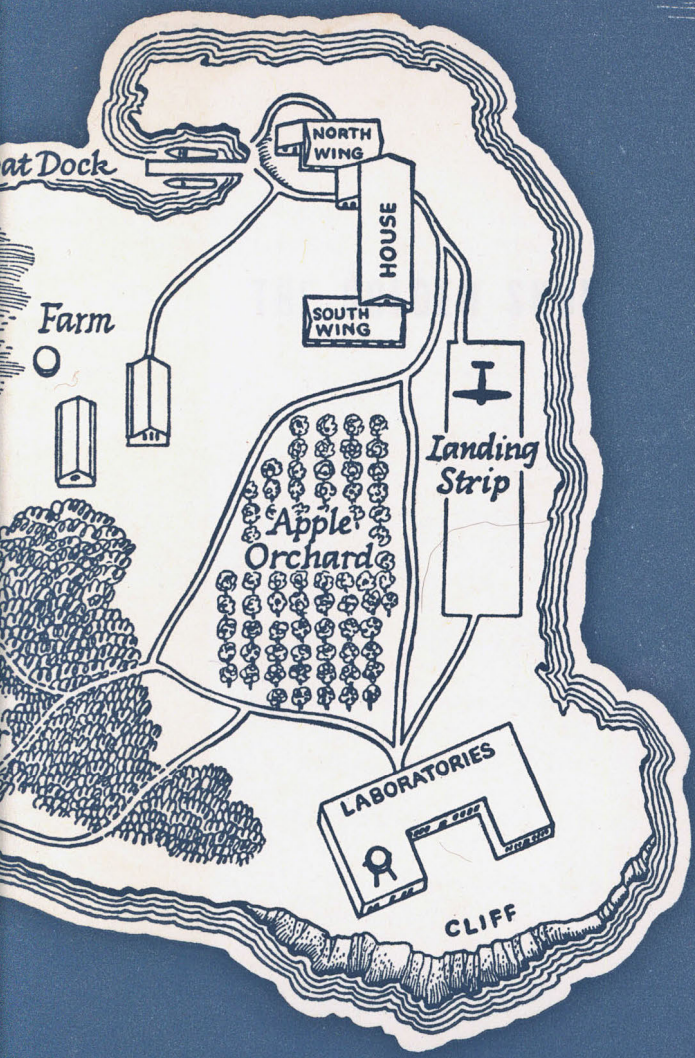

SPINDRIFT ISLAND

THE GOLDEN SKULL

The Rick Brant Science-Adventure *Stories*

BY JOHN BLAINE

The Rocket's Shadow

The Lost City

Sea Gold

100 Fathoms Under

The Whispering Box Mystery

The Phantom Shark

Smugglers' Reef

The Caves of Fear

Stairway to Danger

The Golden Skull

The Ifugaos, faces distorted with hatred and fury, pursued them.

A RICK BRANT SCIENCE-ADVENTURE STORY

THE GOLDEN SKULL

BY JOHN BLAINE

GROSSET & DUNLAP PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK, N. Y.

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Contents

THE GOLDEN SKULL

CHAPTER I

The Head-hunter

IT WAS hot in the cabin of the freighter *Asiatic Dream.* The heaviness of the tropical heat outside the ship penetrated through the steel and flaking paint of the deck to turn the cabin into an oven.

Rick Brant and Don Scott, stripped to their shorts, were oblivious of the heat. They sat hunched over a three-dimensional chessboard, studying the complex moves of their newest hobby. Now and then they glared at each other, or paused to wipe the sweat from their faces or arms, but otherwise they concentrated on the three-layer board and the chessmen. The rivalry was intense, and had been ever since Hartson Brant, Rick's distinguished scientist father, had introduced them to the game back home on Spindrift Island.

Watching them was Dr. Anthony Briotti. Clad in tropical tan shorts and nothing else, he looked like a

college athlete. Little about him suggested that he was an archaeologist with an international reputation.

Presently he rose and left the cabin, heading for the deck. He didn't bother to say where he was going; he knew the boys wouldn't even notice. On deck, Briotti leaned aganst the rail and peered ahead to where the rocky fortress of Corregidor loomed at the mouth of Manila Bay. His pulse beat faster at the sight of the famous island. He knew its outline. He had commanded a destroyer during World War II. Even though the faint light of a new moon showed only vague outlines, he recognized the old Spanish prison rock below the overhang of Corregidor, and he remembered that his guns had blasted at the Japanese from that very point.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw a shadow move fleetingly. He turned but saw nothing. Then, because he was busy with his memories, he turned back to the dim, haunting view of Corregidor and thought no more about it.

Below, Rick Brant moved his king diagonally across the three-dimensional chessboard and said triumphantly, "Checkmate!"

Scotty rose, drew back one muscular leg as though to kick the set into the air, then grinned. "Had to let you win. Bad for morale to lose all the time. Next time I'll teach you how to lose."

Rick snorted. "You let me win like a mother bear would let me walk off with her cubs. It's my remark-

able intellect that won that game, and nothing else."

"Won by your wits, eh?" Scotty mopped his wet face. "And you only half armed!"

Rick shied a chessman at him. "Wait until we teach this game to Chahda."

Scotty chuckled. "He'll probably beat us both at once, then we'll find out he learned how to play from the latest edition of *The World Almanac.*"

Chahda, their Hindu friend, had learned about America by memorizing an old copy of the *Almanac,* and he quoted from it at every opportunity. Since their first meeting in Bombay during the adventure of *The Lost City,* the Indian boy had been with them on several expeditions. Now he was to meet them in Manila to help them in their search for one of ancient history's most fabulous treasures.

Rick, a tall, slim boy, with light-brown hair and brown eyes, led the way up the ladder to the deck. Scotty, bigger and slightly darker in coloring, followed close behind. They walked toward the bow, searching for Briotti, their eyes not yet accustomed to the darkness.

Rick called, "Tony?"

"Here by the rail," the archaeologist answered.

The boys moved toward him, but someone—or something—moved faster. A shadowy form sped past them, and Rick's quick eyes caught the flash of light on steel. He yelled, "Watch it!"

Tony moved, and a steel blade clanged off the ship's rail. Rick and Scotty leaped forward, grasping for the shadow. The steel blade lifted again. Scotty grabbed a wrist and twisted. The blade clattered to the deck. Rick got his arms around a sweaty waist and squeezed, bracing his feet to lift the man off the deck. Then an elbow caught him in the Adam's apple and flooded his eyes with tears of pain. He loosened his grip involuntarily and felt the man squirm free. Scotty yelled, "Get him!"

Tony Briotti swung a roundhouse right that missed and sent him sprawling off balance. Then the assailant was on the rail, poised. Scotty lunged for his ankle as the man dived cleanly out and away from the ship into the dark water. The three rushed to the rail, watching for the swimmer.

"Man overboard!" Tony's voice lifted in a shout that brought the crew running.

For a few moments there was confusion as the officers and crew tried to find out what had happened, and then the searchlight on the bridge was manned and its white beam cut the water.

There was no swimmer. But off toward Bataan Peninsula the light reflected from the patched sail of a *banca,* an outrigger canoe, sailing toward shore with a bone in its teeth.

A few moments later the three Spindrifters stood in the captain's office, staring at a Filipino bolo, a long,

slightly curving machete with a square tip. Tony hefted it and shuddered. "If you hadn't yelled—well, this thing landed right where my head had been a second before."

"If I hadn't said anything," Rick replied, "it wouldn't have been anywhere near your neck. I put the finger on you by calling your name."

Scotty snapped his fingers. "Of course! The guy must have been hiding, until he heard us call. Then, when you answered, he knew you were the one he was after, and he went for you."

Tony stared, incredulous. "But why? I can't imagine why a mountain Igorot would board the ship for the express purpose of killing me!"

It was Rick's turn to stare. "How did you know he was an Igorot?"

"Either an Igorot or an Ifugao," Tony replied. "I caught a glimpse of his head structure as he jumped onto the rail. Besides, the haircut is distinctive. It looks as though a bowl had been put on the head and all hair removed that it didn't cover."

Rick knew that an Igorot was a primitive native of the Philippine Mountain Province. All of them had received a series of lectures on Philippine ethnology from Tony before leaving home. The Igorots bore roughly the same relationship to the regular Filipino as American Indians do to the white American. Ifugao natives

were much like the Igorots, but with a slightly more advanced culture. They, too, lived in Mountain Province, the objective of the Spindrift expedition.

The trip had grown out of an earlier expedition to Kwangara Island in the western Pacific. Dr. Anthony Briotti had helped translate the tablets found in the sunken temple of Alta Yuan, and had discovered the connection between the early people of the Philippines —of whom the Igorots and Ifugaos were the descendants—and the white dragon worshipers of Alta Yuan.

One plaque from the sunken temple had described the Ifugao rice terraces of Mountain Province in unmistakable detail, and also had described a skull of gold which was said to have magic properties.

Tony Briotti had been so enthusiastic about locating this fabulous skull, and proving the connection between Alta Yuan and the Philippines, that Hartson Brant, head of the Spindrift Foundation, had made arrangements for the small expedition. None of the other Spindrift scientists could be spared, so Tony Briotti had only Rick and Scotty as assistants. Chahda was to join them in Manila. The boys thought that was help aplenty. No other helpers were needed.

"I don't believe it," Tony stated. "It is simply beyond possibility that an Igorot could have boarded this ship with the express intention of killing me. More likely, he boarded the ship to steal, thought he was discovered, and headed for the rail where his banca was tied. I was in the way. That's all."

"No one saw the banca approach," the ship's captain said, "but of course it could have. We've been traveling at only a few knots, and the banca could have approached from the stern, thrown a line over the rail, and tied up. Dangerous, but a clever native could do it. They're like cats. Make fine sailors." He added, "Never heard of it being done before, but there's no reason to think it was an attempt at murder. Thieves in the Orient are willing to take long chances."

Rick stared through the port at the lights of Manila. He was very thoughtful. Let Tony try to brush the incident aside. He knew better. He knew it in his bones. There was trouble ahead for the Spindrifters.

He caught Scotty's worried frown, and he knew that his pal's thoughts were the same.

CHAPTER II

Manila After Dark

OUT of the *Asiatic Dream's* forward hold swung the sleek shape of an airplane fuselage. Rick bristled with nervous energy as he watched. He yelled, "Watch it! Take it easy with that winch!"

Scotty patted him on the shoulder. "Take it easy yourself before you pop a gusset. They're doing all right."

Rick didn't take his eyes off the plane. "Okay. But if they drop it, we'll hike into the mountains instead of flying in style. Hey, you! Lift it! Lift it clear of the rail!"

The plane was Rick's new Sky Wagon, a powerful little four-place job that had replaced his beloved Cub, wrecked by saboteurs, as related in *Stairway to Danger.* It had less than ten hours' flying time, and he didn't want it wrecked by having a careless winchman bash it against something. But in spite of his fears, the fuselage was lowered safely onto the waiting truck, the wings

in their crates were brought out, and in a short time the boys were riding with the plane out to Manila International Airport.

The day was still young. The freighter had anchored off the Manila port area during the night, berthing in the early hours. The Spindrift party had checked into the Manila Hotel, and Tony, leaving the boys to supervise the unloading and clearance of their equipment, had gone off to the University of the Philippines. Now the crates of equipment were in the customs shed waiting to be picked up, and the plane was en route to the airport to be assembled. Everything was going smoothly, except . . .

"Chahda," Rick mused. "Where do you suppose he went?"

"The day I can figure out Chahda's comings and goings is the day I polish my crystal ball and solve the rest of the world's mysteries. He's probably off studying *The World Almanac*."

Chahda had been registered at the Manila Hotel but had checked out three days before their arrival. He had left no forwarding address and no message.

"He's probably somewhere in the Indian colony of Manila," Rick speculated. "Quite a few Indians here, mostly Hindus. They call 'em Bombays, Tony said."

"He'll show up," Scotty said. "He always does. Wonder how Tony is making out?"

Tony had gone to see a colleague, a Filipino archae-

ologist by the name of Dr. Remedios Okola. It was through Okola that arrangements had been made with the Philippine Government for their expedition—or would be made. Their permit had not yet been issued.

"I didn't know they had a university here." Scotty added, "Until Tony started writing to this Filipino scientist."

"You should read the stuff Tony brought," Rick replied. "The Philippines has a dozen universities."

Scotty grinned. "Chahda is probably taking a course in one of them. Getting a degree of D.D."

Rick took the bait. "What? Doctor of Divinity or Doctor of Dentistry?"

"Neither. Dean of Disappearances."

Rick groaned. Still, it was true. Chahda was the most disappearing person he had ever known. The truth was, as he well knew, Chahda loved the dramatic. The little Hindu boy thoroughly enjoyed baffling his pals with theatrical appearances and disappearances. Not that he did his vanishing act just for fun, however. There was usually a good reason.

Arrangements had been made by mail and confirmed by phone that morning for hangar space at Manila International Airport. While giant transpacific passenger liners landed or took off, and while the busy twin-engined island hoppers of Philippine Air Lines kept the field active, the boys assembled the Sky Wagon.

Even allowing for Rick's pride of ownership, the Sky

Wagon was a beauty. It was painted pure white with a red strip along the fuselage. It could carry four, plus a fair amount of cargo. It had flaps which permitted slow landings and short take-offs, and it had retractable landing gear and variable-pitch propeller.

Under the rear seats was a special feature—a small hatch through which a winch-driven cable could be operated.

This was a typical Rick Brant labor-saving device. Back home, Rick was the errand boy for Spindrift Island, an island off the New Jersey coast where the famous Spindrift Foundation was located. Until he acquired the Sky Wagon, his grocery shopping meant landing at Whiteside Airport, hiking into town, picking up the groceries, lugging them back, loading them in the Cub and flying back to Spindrift.

Now he could phone in his order, get into the Sky Wagon, lower the weighted cable, and swoop low over the grocery store, which was located on the outskirts of Whiteside. The hook at the end of the cable snagged another cable hung between two steel poles on the roof of the store. The sack of groceries—it was a special strong canvas sack—were on the cable and needed only to be reeled into the plane.

It worked fine. The only trouble was that Rick had never collected eggs intact. The shock of the pickup was a little too much. When he solved that problem, he would make arrangements with the electronic supply house in

Newark to let him put up the same kind of rig. Eventually, he hoped, he would get so efficient that he never would have to land on the mainland except to deliver a passenger or to pay a personal visit.

Rick and Scotty checked the plane over with the greatest of care, and then Rick got in and started the engine. He let it warm up, watching his instruments. Everything was fine. He motioned to Scotty, who was watching and listening from outside.

Scotty got in, and Rick taxied to the end of a runway. While he revved up the engine, Scotty obtained take-off permission from the control tower, and in a few moments they were air-borne, enjoying the sudden drop in temperature.

"First time I've stopped sweating in a week," Scotty said.

Rick nodded and motioned to pump up the landing gear. The hydraulic system worked on a hand pump between the two front seats. It was not as satisfactory as a motor-driven pump, but it took no electric power and used up no valuable weight. Besides, a few strokes on the pump did the job. He leveled off at five thousand feet above the city.

Below, the Pasig River cut the city in half. They traced the line of the great wall around Intramuros, the ancient walled city, and they found the white mass of the American Embassy across Dewey Boulevard from

some very modern apartments. They passed over the Manila Hotel, then saw the ruins of infamous Fort Santiago.

Inland, the land was lush green with high mountains rising in the distance. To the north lay Mountain Province, and behind the screen of mountains was their destination.

There was still work to be done, so Rick reluctantly took the Sky Wagon down again. It was in perfect condition; no need for further flight.

They lunched at a modern drive-in on Dewey Boulevard, the split-lane highway that runs along the edge of Manila Bay, then picked up their crates of supplies at customs. This was a light expedition, so there were only three crates. One held their camp gear and trail clothing. Another crate held Tony Briotti's special tools and reference books. The third held the most important object of the expedition—the Spindrift Experimental Earth Scanner, called SEES for short, and further abbreviated by the boys to a sibilant hiss.

"How's the SS working?" Scotty would ask, and Rick would answer: " 'Sfine 'scan be."

The boys were old hands at expeditions and they had learned from bitter experience about the number of unexpected things that can happen to baggage, so in spite of some opposition from the hotel clerk, they insisted on stowing the supplies in their room. This done, they got

into bathing trunks and cooled off in the hotel pool. There was nothing to do now but wait for Tony—and Chahda.

When they returned from their swim a message was waiting, brought by a messenger from Tony Briotti. Rick read it, then handed it to Scotty. They were to have dinner with Tony's colleague Okola, and an Assistant Secretary of the Interior, a Mr. Lazada, at the latter's house. Dinner was at ten. They were to arrive a half hour early, and wear dinner jackets.

"Dinner at ten!" Scotty was stunned. "It must be a mistake. No one could live until that hour without food."

The desk clerk overheard the comment and smiled. "Old Spanish custom, sir. Many Filipinos follow Spanish custom."

"Very fine for those who are used to it," Rick said. "But here's one Americano who is not going to follow Filipinos who follow old Spanish custom."

"Two Americanos," Scotty corrected. "We will follow old American custom of snack early, English custom of dinner at eight, and then Spanish custom of dinner at ten. That way we get plenty chow, hey?"

This exchange was for their own benefit. The clerk did not overhear because they were hurrying to their rooms to change.

It was not too early to get into dinner jackets. They hauled out what Scotty called their "penguin rigs" and got into them. In spite of feeling a little self-conscious,

they looked brown and handsome in their white tropical jackets with maroon bow ties.

They found a table on the porch, looking out over Manila Bay and the great field called The Luneta. By turning a little Rick could see the traffic on Dewey Boulevard. Rick had never seen anything like it. Apparently Filipino drivers were all mad at something, and all under the impression that no other vehicles were on the road. Also, Filipino drivers obviously had wild affection for their horns. They tooted constantly.

"The life of a pedestrian must be less than ten minutes in this town," Scotty commented.

"Pedestrians are nothing but the raw material for accidents," Rick agreed. "Look at that!"

Among the busses, the cars, and the jeeps that ranged the boulevard trotted a half-dozen two-wheeled carriages drawn by tiny horses. These were the *calesas* of bygone days, still competing with Manila's countless taxis for passengers.

"We should hire two and have a chariot race," Scotty suggested.

They had a sandwich and a cold drink made with *calamansi,* the pungent small Philippine limes, then walked across the boulevard to where the great wall of the old city rose high in the air. The wall was of huge stone blocks, rising about four times the boys' height into the air. It was perhaps twenty feet thick at the base.

Within the walls there had once been a city of a hundred thousand people, but it was there that in World War II the Japanese had chosen to make their last stand. Most of the people of the city had been wiped out, along with their Japanese captors, and of the ancient buildings only a cathedral remained. The area had been bulldozed flat in most places, and Quonset-type warehouses, called *bodegas,* had replaced the ruined Spanish buildings.

"Rick, look at this!" Scotty called, pointing to a fern-like plant that grew near the wall. "Watch." He touched it and the leaves rolled into tight tubes. "How about that?"

A Filipino gentleman, immaculate in a white nylon suit, watched them for a moment, then joined them. "The plant is strange to Americans, I think. It is a sensitive mimosa. You have the mimosa in America, but not this variety."

"It's good of you to explain, sir," Rick said.

"Not at all. In Tagalog, the plant is called *makahiya.* It means, literally, 'I am ashamed when you touch me.' "

"It's ashamed, so it closes up," Rick said. "That's charming. Tagalog must be a picturesque language."

The Filipino nodded. "It has a certain flavor. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Colonel Felix Rojas of the Philippine constabulary."

Rick took his first good look at the Filipino and immediately recognized the soldierly bearing and lean fitness

of the professional soldier. He introduced himself and Scotty.

Colonel Rojas smiled. "The young men who are going to dine with the esteemed Assistant Secretary tonight, eh? Welcome to our country." He bowed and walked away, leaving them openmouthed. Then, as an afterthought, he turned. "Surprised? Don't be. We are interested in strangers until their intentions are known. Yours are above reproach." His smile faded. "However, you may be interested in another bit of Tagalog." He spoke briefly a phrase that seemed to be mostly vowels.

"What does it mean?" Scotty asked.

The colonel's eyes searched theirs. "What good is hay to a dead horse," he said and walked away.

The boys stared at each other.

"A very good question," Rick said at last. The colonel had vanished into the Manila Hotel. "Scotty, what good is hay to a dead horse?"

"The deceased equine has little use for hay," Scotty said. "Obviously. Was that a warning?"

"I don't know what it was," Rick said. The phrase could have been a warning, but of what? And how had the colonel known where they were dining? He put the question aloud.

Scotty shrugged. "Doesn't the constabulary come under the Department of the Interior? Maybe Lazada told him. A colonel would be pretty high rank in the constabulary; he could even be the commander."

The Philippine constabulary had a long and distinguished history. It was similar to a police force, but was a military organization. It was, Rick thought, something like a cross between the American state militia, the Texas Rangers, and any good state police force.

"I'm snowed," Rick said at last. "The only thing I'm sure of is that he wasn't looking for information when he asked what good is hay to a dead horse. Come on. Let's start for Lazada's."

The way led across busy Taft Avenue, named for the American president, across the Ayala Bridge which spanned the Pasig River, and past Malaccan Palace. The palace was the equivalent of our White House. In its time Spanish, American, and Japanese conquerors of the Philippines had lived there. Now it housed the president of the Republic of the Philippines.

It was very dark by the time they passed the palace. They left the street-lighted area and entered an area of old Spanish houses. The Pasig River was very close. They could smell the water hyacinth which floated endlessly down to the sea.

The air was heavy with unshed rain. The boys had long since shed their jackets and were carrying them. Now the heat seemed to push down on them, muffling even the sound of their leather soles on the cobbles. They passed a solitary street light and Rick read the sign. They were on the right track. The hotel clerk's directions, obtained before they ate, had been very good.

"Almost there," Rick whispered, then wondered why he hadn't spoken aloud.

Apparently Scotty was feeling the same physical oppression because he didn't comment on the whisper.

The houses were two-story, old Spanish style, with much wrought-iron fancy work. Few lights showed. Such houses presented only blank faces to the street. The life inside them found its open air in secluded patios in the rear.

"We must be getting close," Scotty said. His voice was very low.

Rick unsnapped his key ring. It had a pencil flashlight attached. He shot the light over the house fronts, searching for a number. A cream-colored lizard darted frantically out of the circle of light into protecting darkness.

"Two more numbers," Rick said. "Must be the house after the next one." He flashed the tiny light ahead and froze as he saw the shape of a man. Beside him, he felt Scotty tense.

It was silly to stand frozen. Rick moved ahead, slowly, and the shape took form. Turban, flowing tunic with sash. Fiercely whiskered face. A Sikh guard.

He breathed a sigh of relief. Sikhs—Indians—were noted for their bravery and fighting ability, and they could be found in most cities of the Far East, usually employed as private guards or police.

The Sikh came to attention and Rick noted that he was rather small for his race. Most Sikhs were big men.

He had kept the light on the bearded face, noting that the beard was neatly tied in the Sikh fashion. Brown eyes stared unblinkingly. A hoarse voice said, "This ees house of Meester Secretary Lazada. Please to enter."

Suddenly the voice changed and Rick nearly jumped out of his skin.

"Go right on up the stairs, meatheads. Scotty must be hungry. He always is."

Rick choked.

"Chahda!"

CHAPTER III

The Gods of Banaue

SCOTTY reached out for the Hindu boy, but Chahda stepped nimbly aside. "Not time for horseplay now," he said. "Or talk either. Houseboy will hear. It important I stay under cover. You go up and eat. Later, if I can, I will come to Manila Hotel. If I cannot, I will meet you in Baguio."

The boys knew better than to argue. They each punched Chahda affectionately as they passed him, then Rick knocked on the door, which was instantly opened by a Filipino houseboy.

The houseboy led them up a steep flight of stairs into a huge living room, sparsely furnished after the tropical fashion, but with exquisite and expensive Chinese furniture of rosewood and teak. Tony Briotti came to meet them, then introduced them to Dr. Remedios Okola and the Honorable Irineo Lazada.

Dr. Okola, obviously, had a great deal of Spanish blood in his ancestry. He was tall and lean, with a

deeply lined face and a magnificent hawklike nose. His hair was iron gray. He wore black dress trousers and an open-neck slipover shirt of a very fine, almost transparent, fabric heavily embroidered down the front. The shirt hung outside his trousers in traditional style. This was the *barong* Tagalog, the native Filipino costume.

Where the Filipino archaeologist showed his Spanish blood, the Honorable Irineo Lazada's face betrayed his Chinese ancestry. He was round of face, and his eyes had the typical Mongoloid fold. He was dressed in an expensive white sharkskin suit with a white American-style shirt and a black tie. The tie was held in place by the biggest diamond Rick had ever seen. He assumed it was real; no one would wear a phony one that big.

Lazada had a huge Manila cigar in one hand and a fan in the other. By some feat of legerdemain he managed to shake hands with the boys without letting go of either.

"Come in, come in," he said genially. "Welcome to the Philippines. You will have some refreshment? How about a coke?"

That suited the boys fine. Lazada waved a pudgy hand and a slippered houseboy appeared like a genie, carrying two iced glasses of coke. Rick was not in the least surprised. He had had his favorite American beverage in more unexpected places than this.

Tony Briotti explained, "Dr. Okola and I just got here. We had a most interesting day at the university. I was

beginning to go into the details of our expedition with Mr. Lazada."

"Please continue," Lazada said expansively.

Rick, who was sensitive to voices, had the impression that Mr. Lazada's voice passed through a bath of highly refined oil before it emerged from his thick lips. It wasn't exactly oily—just sort of overlubricated.

Lazada alternately smoked and fanned. "You were telling me of Spindrift Island. Am I to gather that you are the only Spindrift scientist on this expedition? And that these young men just came for the voyage?"

"By no means." Tony set Lazada straight. "Rick is our pilot and electronics technician. Scotty is mechanic and camp manager."

"Pilot?" Lazada looked surprise.

Dr. Okola hastened to explain. "I neglected to tell Mr. Lazada that you are bringing your own plane. Of course, sir, permission was obtained in advance from the Philippine Aeronautics Authority."

"A helicopter, of course," Lazada said. "Nothing else would be of value in Mountain Province. The only airfield is at Baguio."

"It's a four-place Sky Wagon," Rick said. "We hoped there might be some suitable landing places."

Lazada shrugged. "Perhaps there are, but they are not regular airports. Planes do not fly in that country. Both the mountains and the weather are dangerous."

"Might it not be possible for them to land on the

roadway at Bontoc and then go over the mountains to Banaue by truck?" Dr. Okola asked.

"Perhaps." Lazada didn't seem too optimistic. "Exactly where do you expect to find this golden skull?" He added, "I can tell you more about the transportation you will need when I know that."

"We only know that it should be somewhere among the rice terraces," Tony Briotti said. "I realize that they cover entire mountainsides. That is why we came prepared to stay for some time if need be. There is so much territory to cover with our equipment!"

"Many square miles," Lazada agreed. "What is the expression? A needle in a haystack? Surely you must have some kind of clue."

"Just one," Dr. Okola said. "A dragon. Isn't that so, Dr. Briotti?"

Tony nodded. "That's what the translation of the Kwangara Island artifacts said. The dragon is supposed to be guarding a cache of religious objects, including the golden skull and other gold objects."

"You mean a gilt skull, of course," Lazada said.

"No, the description was quite clear. A skull of metallic gold."

"A miniature, probably."

"No, sir. The skull is actually larger than life size."

Lazada stopped slouching in his chair. "Incredible!"

Dr. Okola spoke up. "After all, Mr. Secretary, gold is mined right here in the Philippines. In Mountain Prov-

ince, in fact. And it is found in many other parts of Asia."

Rick had a strange feeling as he watched Lazada's face. The Assistant Secretary seemed to be licking his lips, although he wasn't actually doing so. It was almost as though Lazada was doing sums in his head. . . . Gold is heavy. . . . It would take a lot of gold to make a life-size skull, even a hollow one. . . . Gold is worth thirty-five dollars an ounce, legally. If smuggled into China, it would bring twice that . . .

"Tell me more of this dragon," Lazada invited.

Tony was glad to oblige. Next to actually working at his profession he enjoyed talking about it. "The dragon is of the greatest importance throughout the culture of the East. We followed its trail from the great temple of Ankor Vat in Cambodia all the way to the sunken temple of Alta Yuan."

Rick remembered vividly. He had been at the controls of the Submobile, a hundred fathoms under the waters of the Pacific, when the first Alta Yuan dragon came to light.

"The dragon was the incarnation of the chief god of the Alta Yuan people. When an earthquake sank the temple, the people of the island lost their gods. When we hauled the dragon back up and gave it to them, nothing was too good for us." He paused. "By 'we' I mean the Spindrift scientists. I was not among the lucky ones, since I had not yet joined the Spindrift group."

Okola shared Tony's excitement over the Alta Yuan

find. "I, too, was very much interested in that expedition. And when I heard that the artifacts brought from the bottom of the sea provided a possible connection between the Philippines and that ancient culture, you can imagine my excitement."

Rick could see that Lazada could not possibly imagine so much excitement over an archaeological find, but was too courteous to say so.

"Then finding a similar dragon among the rice terraces would show a link between our country and the ruins of Ankor Vat?" Lazada asked.

"Exactly," Tony replied.

Lazada rose. "Dinner is ready. Let us continue our discussion at the table."

They went out to a balcony which overlooked a garden at the rear of the house. A table set with the finest Chinese linen and delicate Siamese silverware was waiting for them. Houseboys waited to serve them. Over a dinner of broiled giant prawns, meat-stuffed rolls called *lumpia,* and whole barbecued suckling pig called *lechon,* they continued their talk of the expedition.

"What is the significance of the golden skull?" Lazada asked.

"I did not know until today," Tony answered. "I found out from my esteemed colleague here. He has been doing some very hard work on it. Will you answer, Dr. Okola?"

The Filipino archaeologist looked pleased, but he

hastened to say, "The credit is not mine alone. I had the invaluable assistance of one of my graduate students, who is himself an Ifugao. A brilliant young man. Next week I am attending a celebration at his home, in honor of his becoming an assistant professor at the university."

"I'm sorry I didn't meet him," Tony Briotti said. "Did you mention his name?"

"Nangolat. However, Mr. Lazada asked about the significance of the golden skull. We were able to uncover a story about it among the many Ifugao myths, a story of which I had not been aware until Dr. Briotti's letters put me on the track. You realize that the Ifugao religion is rich in myths. It is a very complicated religion with over a thousand gods."

Scotty whistled. "They must have a god for nearly everything they say or do."

"Just about," Dr. Okola agreed. "Even their universe is divided into five regions. There is the known earth, *pugao*; the sky world, *kabunian*; the region downriver, *lagod*; the region upriver, *daiya*; and the underworld, *dalun*."

"What river?" Rick asked.

"Any river on which they happen to live," Okola answered. "No one knows exactly what the original river of the Ifugaos might have been. You see, they are immigrants. They came from the Chinese mainland, but we don't know exactly when, or whether their original home

was China. Perhaps we will find out that it was Cambodia. We do know that their miraculous rice terraces were started at least two thousand years ago."

"That makes them almost as old as the pyramids!" Scotty exclaimed.

"Quite right. The whole culture is quite astonishing. We think of them as primitive people, but their history is more complex than our own. However, we are speaking of heads. Heads have always been of the greatest religious importance to the Ifugaos. They have been head-hunters for religious and economic reasons for centuries. First America, and then the Republic of the Philippines tried to stamp out the custom. In general, we have succeeded. There is little or no head-hunting now—so far as we know."

Lazada grunted. "The mountains are difficult to police. I doubt that we know all that goes on. I wouldn't be surprised if a head wasn't taken now and then. After all, the Ifugaos got the heads of two American professors only a few years ago."

"The murders were for religious reasons," Okola explained. "Sacrifices were needed for the rice crop. The unfortunate professors were on a hiking trip, and they happened along at just the wrong moment."

Rick remembered newspaper reports of the incident. It had attracted world-wide attention. The Ifugao natives responsible had been captured by the Philippine constabulary, tried, and punished.

Okola continued, "We have traced back a thread through the complicated maze of Ifugao myths. The thread leads to a legendary hero—the leader-god who led the Ifugaos to the Philippines. The golden skull was originally his own, turned to gold by the very power of the hero's magic. After his death, of course. At first it was an ordinary skull, then it turned to gold."

"Then the skull has something to do with head-hunting?" Rick asked.

"Indeed it does. It is apparently the chief object to which heads are sacrificed—or was, before it was lost. The golden skull is *almaduan,* the very soul stuff of the Ifugaos."

"How was it lost?" Scotty inquired.

"In a war," Okola said, quite seriously, "between the *kabunian,* the gods of the sky world, and the *dalun,* the gods of the underworld. The *dalun* won. They took the head and disappeared into the ground somewhere in Banaue. Behind them, they left a great taboo. If an Ifugao tries to follow them into the underworld to reclaim the skull, great misfortune will come. An earthquake will destroy the terraces. The people will starve. They will be haunted by the *dodingerot*—ghouls who dwell in tombs and bite the faces of intruders."

"Then the Ifugaos will take a dim view of our hunting their golden skull," Rick guessed.

"They might if they knew about it," Dr. Okola said. "Actually, what I have just told you is almost forgotten

lore. I doubt that the Ifugao man in the street—or, properly, man in the rice terraces—has ever heard of it. A few old priests may remember."

Irineo Lazada clapped his hands and rose. "Coffee in the living room, gentlemen. You know, I begin to have some hope for this golden skull. I had not really taken your expedition seriously until Dr. Okola's recital."

Tony Briotti picked him up quickly. "Then that is why you have failed to issue our permit?"

Rick stopped in his tracks. Was there trouble about their permit? He had wondered about the reason for this dinner with the Assistant Secretary of the Interior. Perhaps it was to persuade him.

Lazada smiled. "The government doesn't want to stir up trouble among the mountain tribes. We do not have enough constabulary for police duty in the mountains. A small detachment at Baguio is the best we can do."

"I assure you that we will not stir up trouble," Tony Briotti said.

"Of course not. And so I will issue your permit."

"Thank you, Mr. Secretary," Dr. Okola said. "This will mean a great deal to the Philippines. Dr. Briotti assures me that Spindrift will not ask for anything to be removed from the islands. The golden skull, if it is found, will remain right here, perhaps at the university's museum."

"Such a treasure would need to be well guarded," Lazada chuckled. "We do have thieves in the Philippines, as does every other country." Again he seemed

to be licking his lips without actually doing so.

Over a second cup of coffee they laid their plans. Lazada would instruct the district road commissioner at Bontoc to co-operate with them in every way, since that official came under his jurisdiction. Through the district commissioner they could hire any laborers they might need. The commissioner also would arrange for Rick's plane to land on the highway at Bontoc when necessary. Since there was little traffic, landing would present no real problems. They could use the district office at Bontoc, and make it their headquarters.

Dr. Okola sighed, "I can't tell you how sorry I am that you come in the midst of a school seminar. If you are still searching at the end of next week, I will join you. But until then, it will be impossible."

"But you will send us a good guide who knows the area," Tony reminded him.

"Yes. He will be at your hotel in the morning. His name is Angel Manotok, and you can trust him with no hesitation. He speaks Igorot and Ifugao, as well as the Filipino dialects of this region. He can drive a truck, and he can cook reasonably well." Okola pronounced the man's name in the Spanish way, "Ahng-hel."

"Sounds like a handy guy to have around," Scotty remarked.

"Yes," Rick agreed. "Besides, it's nice to have an angel in the party."

The hour was late. The boys and Tony Briotti bade good night to Lazada and Okola, refused the offer of

another coke but accepted a ride back to the hotel in Lazada's car. As they left the house the boys looked for Chahda. There was a Sikh at the gate, but he was a big man. Chahda was not in sight.

Lazada's car turned out to be a brand-new Cadillac with a special maroon paint job and a monogram about four inches square on every door. Evidently the Assistant Secretary believed in personal advertising.

They were tired. The ride back to the Manila Hotel was made in silence, except for a brief report to Tony that all was in readiness for the trip to Baguio on the first leg of their journey.

At the hotel desk they picked up their room keys. The boys had one room, Tony another. The rooms were on the second floor, so they walked upstairs instead of bothering with the slow elevators.

"Good night, boys," Tony said wearily. He inserted his key and swung the door open, then stiffened as a crash sounded in the room. Rick and Scotty snapped out of their weary haziness and leaped into the room behind Tony in time to see a figure dive headlong from the window.

Rick yelled in horror. They rushed to the window, expecting to see the man dead on the ground below. Instead, they saw him swing lightly from the branch of a flame tree and drop to the ground. He ran across Dewey Boulevard and was lost in the darkness under the walls of Intramuros.

CHAPTER IV

Inside the Walls

"THE fire escape!" Scotty yelled.

Rick was with him on the instant. They ran to the end of the corridor, threw open the door, and dashed down the fire escape. No word passed between them as they crossed Dewey Boulevard. At a time like this their teamwork was automatic.

They reached the walls of Intramuros, and Scotty went left, Rick right. Somewhere along the walls, or within the city, was the intruder. The question was Had the intruder kept right on going across the walled city, or was he in hiding, waiting to see whether or not he was being pursued? If the former, their chances of catching up with him were almost zero.

Rick rounded the corner of the wall and had a clear view all the way down to the Department of Commerce building nearly a half mile away. There were sufficient street lights to show him that the quarry was not in sight.

He saw a breach in the wall a few yards away and hurried toward it. There was almost no light within the walled city, he suspected, but he would have to look. The breach turned out to be a pile of rubble. He would have to go over the wall unless he wanted to search for an entrance. There wasn't time for that. He climbed up the pile of rubble, careful about his footholds, and gained the top of the wall. For a moment he was silhouetted at his full height.

And in that instant a rifle cracked. He saw the muzzle flame, and in the next instant he heard the soft smacking sound of the slug as it went past his ear. There was only one thing to do. He jumped.

The wall was high, and he had no way of knowing what was below, but it was better to risk unknown rubble than another shot from the sniper's gun.

He landed with knees flexed, struck level ground, but fell forward with the momentum of the fall. Thorns dug into his hands and he smothered a grunt of pain. He lay where he was, not moving, waiting for some move from the sniper and for his eyes to adjust themselves to the dense blackness within the walls.

He wondered whether the sniper and intruder were the same man. The intruder had carried no rifle when he went out the hotel window. But it was possible that he had cached one somewhere under the wall.

What could the man have been after? Rick rejected the idea that this was common thievery. It was possible,

but not probable. Especially after the attack on Tony Briotti aboard the boat. And after finding that Chahda had gone underground and was posing as a Sikh.

He was sure something was cooking that boded ill for the expedition. Nor did he have to rack his brains to find the cause. A golden skull was reason enough. Mass murder had been committed for less gold many times before this.

His eyes searched the darkness, and his ears strained for the slightest sound, but no movement or noise followed. Yet, unless the sniper were the world's most silent walker, he could not have slipped away.

And where was Scotty?

Again he pondered the mystery of Chahda. The Hindu boy had been registered at the Manila Hotel, waiting for the Spindrift party. Then, three days before their arrival, he had checked out and gotten a job as a guard at Lazada's. The disguise didn't cause Rick much wonderment. Sikhs, after all, are Indians, and Chahda had once worked for a Sikh officer in the Bengal Lancers. Rick remembered that from an incident during the Tibet expedition. It was probable that Chahda had simply gone to the chief Sikh in Manila—there was always such a leader—and enlisted his aid.

But why?

Rick tensed, sensing a presence near him. He raised on one elbow and thought he discerned a figure nearby. The figure was close to the wall. He had a hunch that it

was Scotty, but he couldn't be sure. He made no further movement, waiting to see.

The figure became clearer, passed close in front of him, and from his low vantage point the man was silhouetted against the sky, which had a pink glow from the myriad neon lights of downtown Manila. No doubt of it, the figure was Scotty's. Rick got to his feet, and staying close to the wall, moved in the same direction Scotty had taken.

The inner ground of the walled city was fairly clear, but close to the walls there was considerable debris. Rick proceeded carefully, trying not to make a noise. He picked his way through tangles of weeds and wire, loose stone, and piles of junk that had been accumulating since the days of the Spanish conquistadors.

He was tense, and his face was wet with sweat. There was a possibility that the sniper was gone, but if not, a noise could bring a lethal slug. Rick thought grimly that the ancient walled city probably had seen many a murder in the more than three hundred years since the wall had been built. He had no desire to be the most recent victim.

Even as the thought crossed his mind, his foot struck the edge of a twisted sheet of steel. The sheet, all that remained of a Japanese armored car, rang dully.

Instantly the rifle flamed. The slug smacked into the stone wall a foot from Rick's shoulder. He didn't wait for the next shot. He hit the ground, scuttled a few

feet, and stopped in a thorny patch. He grimaced and risked wiping the sweat off his brow. At least one question was answered. The sniper had not left.

Rick knew that the mysterious rifleman could have gotten away before this. The fact that he was still lying in wait could mean only one thing. He had known he was being pursued by the Spindrifters, and he had waited in the hope of picking off one or two of them.

Fingers of ice laid themselves across Rick's spine. It was no fun being the object of deadly intentions. He lay very still.

His hand brushed something soft among the thorns, and he thought he knew what it was. He was lying in a patch of the tiny pink flowers known as *cadena de amor* —chain of love. He had seen them everywhere during the day. They grew like weeds anywhere they were allowed to flourish.

The humor of it touched him. How romantic his sister Barbara would think it—to be trailing a desperado through an ancient Spanish city, and to be flat on one's stomach in a patch of chain of love. If he got out of this with a whole skin, he would write her about it, omitting such unpleasant facts as rifle bullets striking too close and thorns among the flowers.

But unless he did something about it, he probably would still be lying there at dawn. He rose to his knees, then to his feet, holding his breath until lack of response from the rifleman told him he had not been observed.

Then he resumed his slow march in the direction Scotty had taken.

All guidebooks to the Philippines mentioned the walled city as a "must-see" item for tourists, and Rick had intended to take a daytime tour. This was not a suitable substitute. He would still have to return by day. He moved on, with extreme caution. He could see nothing but the upper edge of the wall and the silhouette of the ancient cathedral a few hundred yards away. But movement of air, a slight thinning of the darkness, told him when he passed openings in the thick wall.

Suddenly he stopped, all senses alert. He had heard something. As he waited, muscles rigid with the strain of listening, he heard a whisper no louder than the rustle of a moth's wing.

"Rick?"

"Yes," he breathed.

Even though he was expecting it, he gave an involuntary jump when Scotty's hand touched his sleeve. Scotty's lips touched his ear and the husky ex-marine whispered almost inaudibly:

"Gate to the street. Ten paces ahead. I have an empty gasoline drum. Going to throw it. If he fires and is close enough, rush him. If not, make for the gate. Can't stay here all night."

Rick found Scotty's shoulder and squeezed it to indicate agreement, then he crouched low, ready to move like a plunging fullback in any direction.

Scotty moved away. In a moment Rick heard the faint scrape of metal on stone. He filled his lungs with air, then held his breath, waiting.

He sensed rather than saw Scotty lift the gas drum over his head. Even when empty, gas drums weigh quite a bit, but Scotty launched it like a medicine ball. Rick saw it briefly, a cylindrical shadow against the sky, then it landed with an appalling clatter, struck sparks from a stone, and rolled noisily away.

The rifle flamed one, twice. It was perhaps twenty paces away, and the shooting was toward the drum. Rick rushed forward, arms outstretched. He heard a slap like a baseball hitting a glove, then a cry of pain. The rifle blasted again, muzzle skyward.

Rick thought he heard a siren wail, but there wasn't time to wonder. He sprang headlong toward the rifleman. His shoulder struck flesh which yielded. Then warm metal touched his hand and he grabbed for it. The rifle barrel! He leaned on it, keeping it vertical, and put his weight into the job of driving its owner back off balance.

A blow caught him under the eye and he saw stars. For a moment he relaxed his grip, then he released the rifle and reached until he found cloth. He pulled, letting himself go backward as the wearer of the cloth was pulled off balance. He landed on his back, and a knee in the chest drove the air out of him. He rolled sideways, fists driving out. One connected and the shock of

hitting bone ran through his knuckles and up his arm.

A heavy weight landed on his stomach and he grunted, trying to roll out from under. Again his fist lashed out and connected. He drew it back for another punch.

Brilliant light illuminated the scene. Rick blinked in the glare and saw Scotty's grim face above him. Scotty had his fist cocked back for a punch that would have knocked him colder than a raspberry popsickle.

"Hold it," Rick grunted. Scotty was forcing the air out of him by sheer weight.

Running feet pounded the earth and hands jerked both of them to their feet. Scotty held the sniper's rifle, but the sniper was gone.

A Filipino policeman looked at them over the sights of a .45 caliber Colt automatic. Even in the reflected lights of the prowl car's head lamps, the muzzle looked only slightly smaller than the entrance to Mammoth Cave.

Rick's hair lifted. "Put that thing down!" he gulped.

"Officer," Tony said crisply, "these are the two boys from my party. They were chasing the burglar." He added, "Apparently they succeeded only in catching each other. What in the name of an Igorot icebox were you two trying to do?"

The boys looked embarrassed. "We had the sniper," Rick explained. "But we must have got tangled up. I thought the man with the rifle was the burglar, but it was Scotty."

"He threw the rifle at me," Scotty said. "I reached for him, swung on him and connected, then the rifle knocked me down."

The policeman's running mate came back from a search of the darkness. He spoke to his companion in Tagalog.

"No use," the first policeman said. "He is gone. We would need help to find him, since the walled city is big and has many hiding places. Can you give a description? By the time help came he could be miles from here. Perhaps we can get him later."

Rick knew how hopeless that was.

"Unless the boys got a better look," Tony Briotti said, "the only thing I can say is that he was either an Igorot or an Ifugao. Short and muscular. I saw his haircut—couldn't very well miss it. But not his face."

Rick and Scotty hadn't even seen that much. An Igorot or Ifugao? Probably the latter, since their expedition was connected with the Ifugaos and not the Igorots. Rick remembered the incident on the freighter. There was a pattern to this. . . .

"I will be the one to take the rifle," the policeman said.

Rick wondered at the strange flavor of the phrase. But he was to hear it many times while in the Philippines. "I will be the one . . ." It was a literal translation from the Spanish.

"I will be the one to take the names," the second policeman said, opening his notebook. "You will have to make charges."

"No use," Tony replied. "Let's forget the whole thing. We'll never catch up with the man, whoever he was."

Nevertheless, the police insisted on names and histories, and it was ten minutes before the Spindrifters made their way back to the hotel. In the main dining room they talked over cups of hot chocolate, ignoring the curious stares of late supper guests who obviously wondered about Rick and Scotty's disheveled condition.

Since the boys had not wanted to discuss their personal business in front of Lazada's chauffeur there had been no chance to tell Tony about Chahda. Now they did so, and Rick ticked off points on his fingers.

"Item One: The man on the boat who tried to chop you. Either an Igorot or Ifugao. Item Two: Chahda checks out of the hotel and appears as a Sikh guard at Lazada's."

"You forgot Item Three," Scotty added. "Colonel Felix Rojas. Asked us what good is hay to a dead horse, and knew we were having dinner at Lazada's." He described the incident to Tony.

"Item Four," Rick continued. "We find a prowler in your room. He had a rifle cached in the walled city and waited around to use it on us. He was either an Igorot or Ifugao." He spread his hands. "Do we need anything more? Something is in the wind. But what?"

"A golden skull," Scotty said.

"Yes. But we don't have it. Does it make sense for anyone to try to knock us off before we have it? Shucks,

we don't even know where it is, except that it's somewhere among the rice terraces."

"Which is like saying that somewhere in the Mohave Desert is a buried treasure," Scotty added.

Tony Briotti sighed. "I had heard a great deal about the penchant you two have for mysteries and excitement. Now I believe everything I've heard and more. I can't imagine any reason for all these happenings. They simply don't make sense."

"They do to someone," Rick said, and Scotty nodded agreement.

Their waiter approached, an envelope in his hand. "Meester Brant? This come while you outside. You take?"

Rick took. "Must have arrived while Scotty and I were battling for the boxing championship of the walled city." He tore it open.

"Item Five," he said. "From Chahda. 'Can't come now. Meet you in Baguio. Watch yourselves. Big danger from Ifugao no palate.' "

Scotty held his head with both hands. "Great! How do we know whether or not an Ifugao has no palate?"

"Look down the throats of every one we see," Rick said wearily. "Or maybe if an Ifugao has no palate he wears a sign to say so."

Tony Briotti rose. "That message makes no sense, either. And I make no sense to myself. It's late. Come on to bed. Maybe everything will clear up in the morning."

"Go to bed or go nuts," Rick added. "The choice is easy. But let's bar the windows. Just to keep the night air out."

"Amen," Scotty said. "I think I'll break out my rifle and keep it by the bed. Just in case some of that dangerous night air gets in."

CHAPTER V

Manotok the Mighty

At breakfast the next morning Rick and Scotty were subjected to an amused scrutiny by Tony. He ticked off the items on his fingers.

"Rick has a slight mouse under one eye, and his left arm seems a little stiff. I noticed that he sat down gingerly, and that there is a very pronounced bruise on the side of his jaw. Hands would indicate that he has been playing with a rather rough cat, except that I happen to know he was scrambling around in some cadena de amor.

"Scotty is also wearing a mouse under one eye, perhaps a little more prominent than Rick's. And he has a long scratch behind the left ear, obviously caused by some sharp instrument."

The archaeologist grinned. "If you do that to each other, what would you do to an enemy?"

The boys grinned back. "Can't tell you until we catch

an enemy," Rick replied. "Actually, most of my terrible wounds came from falling down."

"Same here," Scotty agreed. "And that sharp instrument you mentioned was the edge of a tin can."

Tony spooned succulent orange-colored papaya melon with appreciation. "Have either of you figured out what our Ifugao friend—let's assume that he was an Ifugao—wanted in my room last night?"

"The only answer I can think of is the obvious one," Rick answered. "He probably thought we have a map or something showing the location of the golden skull. He wanted it."

"I accept the hypothesis only because I haven't a better one," Tony said. "How about you, Scotty?"

Scotty shrugged. "Can't buy it. But on the other hand, I don't have any theory. Wish Sherlock Holmes were here."

"We could use him," Briotti admitted. "Well, what's the program for today?"

"Off to Baguio," Rick replied. "But first, we'll have to rent or buy a truck. The plane can't carry us plus our gear, and we'll need the truck to take our stuff into the mountains. Scotty and I can do that. What are your plans?"

"There's an American anthropologist here I'd like to see. He's internationally known. Name of J. Walter McGowan. I made a tentative appointment yesterday. I'm sure he will have some information on the Ifugaos that

will be of interest. Probably Okola has included in his papers on the subject everything McGowan knows, but I'd like to talk with him just to get the feel of things, so to speak."

"Then why don't you do that this morning?" Rick suggested. "We'll get the truck, load the gear, and get ready to take off."

"Wonder where that Filipino Angel is?" Scotty asked. "Wasn't he supposed to be here this morning?"

"I don't think Okola specified a time," Tony replied. "And the morning is still pretty young."

That was true enough, Rick thought. Besides, he had the impression that the Filipinos, although they followed Western customs, had the Far Easterners' disregard of time.

"If the Angel doesn't arrive, one of us will have to drive the truck to Baguio," he said. "I had hoped he would take the truck, then we three could fly."

Scotty asked, with deceptive casualness, "Tony, what do you think of Dr. Okola?"

Tony answered promptly. "A first-rate scientist and a distinguished gentleman besides. Why?"

"Do you trust him?"

"Implicitly. We're not dealing with a stranger here, Scotty. Okola's name has been known to me since I first became interested in archaeology. We have many mutual friends, and he has been very helpful and courteous since this project was first proposed. Yes, I trust him."

"That's good," Scotty said, "since we're buying the services of this Angel purely on his say-so. We'll have to trust Angel. We have no choice."

"True. I'm prepared to trust him, simply because Okola said we could."

Rick nodded agreement. "I'll take him on faith, too." He had learned not to be overtrustful in far places among strangers, but he agreed with Tony's estimate of Okola. The man, he believed, was just what he seemed to be—a Filipino scientist and gentleman. He had liked Okola.

"All right," Scotty said. "I'll go along. Okola seemed like a real *compadre.* But how about Lazada? Do you trust him?"

Tony considered. He finished his papaya, then tackled a mango salad, an unusual but delicious breakfast dish. "I don't *dis*trust him," he said finally. "That's negative, but the best I can do. He's not the type of individual who appeals to me very much, but without further evidence I'd hesitate to mark him untrustworthy."

"I have a hunch," Rick said. "My hunch says that Mr. Lazada is crooked as a helical coil. I wouldn't trust him anywhere, any time."

Scotty agreed. "I would have said he's no straighter than the cutting edge of a saw. And he's just about that sharp, too. Trouble with you is, Tony, you're too civi-

lized. You always see the best in everything, including people."

"Don't you?" Tony asked mildly.

The boys chuckled. Of course they did, and Tony knew it. But on an expedition like this, their suspicions came to the fore and they automatically distrusted everyone. Lack of distrust had caused them much trouble on other expeditions, and had come close to costing them their lives.

The headwaiter approached. "There is a man to see Dr. Briotti. Shall I have him wait?"

"That must be Okola's man," Tony said. "No, please bring him here."

The three watched with interest as the headwaiter went to the door and returned leading a short, dark man.

Rick examined him with interest. At first glance the Filipino seemed quite short, as so many of his race are. Then Rick's discerning eyes saw the breadth of his shoulders. And he saw that the man wasn't really very short; he only seemed to be because of his extraordinary shoulder width.

The man was dressed simply but neatly in typical Filipino style with white trousers and a white shirt. The shirt had no tail, but was cut square at the bottom like a sport shirt. The collar was sport-shirt style, too, worn open, and disclosed a muscular throat.

The man bowed slightly. "Dr. Briotti?"

"I am Briotti." He indicated the boys. "Mr. Brant and Mr. Scott. And you?"

"I am Angel Manotok, at your service. Dr. Okola said that you needed a driver, guide, and general handyman. He said that he had recommended me."

"Yes. Please sit down. Will you have breakfast?"

"Some coffee, perhaps. I have already had breakfast."

Angel Manotok had a strong, square face. Rick thought that he looked very much like an American Indian. His hair was thick and very black, and freshly cut into a sort of crew cut.

"You will want to see my papers," Angel said.

He produced a wallet and extracted several documents. The Spindrifters examined them. There was a Philippine driver's license, a United States Army driver's license indicating that the bearer was qualified to drive military vehicles, an honorable discharge from the Philippine Scouts, which had been a part of the United States Army, and a certificate from the Philippine Public Health Service certifying that Angel Manotok, as of three weeks ago, had been X-rayed and found free of tuberculosis.

"So you were in the Philippine Scouts," Scotty remarked.

Angel grinned, showing strong white teeth. "I have been many things, including a scout. I have also been a lumberjack in Zambales Province, a gold miner in Baguio, and a farmer in Mindanao."

"You speak remarkably good English," Tony commented.

"Thank you, sir. You will notice from my discharge that I was a sergeant in the Philippine Scouts. I had the advantage of American military schools. I also attended college—the Ateneo de Manila, which has American Jesuit priests as teachers. I did not graduate, unfortunately, but I did learn your language rather better than most Filipinos."

Rick liked Angel at once. He nodded at Tony and Scotty, and they nodded back. Tony at once began discussing salary and general arrangements with Angel.

When they had reached an agreement, Angel grinned. "Now I can tell you. Since Dr. Okola was very anxious for me to go, I was prepared to work for you just for food. But a salary is much better."

"Much," Tony agreed. "We prefer it that way, too, although I appreciate your loyalty to Dr. Okola."

"Where is your baggage?" Rick asked.

"I left it outside at the desk. I haven't much to carry along. Just work clothes and a few tools."

"Where can we get a truck?" Scotty inquired.

"What kind would you like?"

Rick answered. "An Army six-by-six, if possible."

"That can be done. Rent or buy?"

"Which do you suggest?"

"Rent. Let me do it for you. I can bargain much better than you can."

"Fine," Rick agreed. "We'll go with you and watch."

Angel shook his head. "Better not. If the dealer knows the truck is for Americans, the price will go up. If he thinks it is for a Filipino, the price will be low. Let me get a truck—I'll be sure it's a good one—and meet you here."

Rick considered. "No, let's make another plan. I want to spend a little more time checking my plane. Suppose you get the truck, then meet us at Hangar 18 at the airport. We can come back here and load after lunch. Then we can fly to Baguio while you follow with the truck."

"Have you ever driven to Baguio?" Scotty asked.

"Many times. It takes between six and seven hours, depending on the traffic. Some parts of the road aren't very good, and traffic piles up."

"Then if you leave at noon, you should be in Baguio at dinnertime."

"Yes. Shall I go now? I will need a hundred pesos. That is for a deposit on the truck."

Tony opened his billfold. "Let's see. That's fifty dollars. Is American money all right?"

Angel smiled. "American money is always all right, everywhere. I will get a truck and then come to the airport. Yes?"

"Yes. And glad to have you with us," Rick said.

Scotty and Tony echoed his remark and they shook

hands all around. Angel tucked the pesos into his wallet and hurried out.

"Good deal," Scotty said. "He's a lot of man. Notice those shoulders? And his hands show he's used to work. I like him."

Rick and Tony did, too, and said so. "I feel better about him going off alone with our stuff," Rick said.

"Except for the SS," Scotty added, referring to the earth scanner. "You heard what he said about the road to Baguio? That's a delicate gadget and we don't want it banged around too much."

"You've got a point," Rick agreed. "Suppose we take it with us in the plane?"

"Good idea." Scotty rose. "Tony, we'll go on to the airport and meet you here about eleven thirty. Okay?"

"That will give me plenty of time." The scientist hesitated. "I know you'll take care of yourselves. Remember that we have a sniper after us. Not to mention an Ifugao with no palate. Incidentally, I suspect that our friend Angel has a little Igorot or Ifugao blood. Did you notice that he resembles the American Indian?"

"I did," Rick said. "Would it be unusual for him to have Igorot blood?"

"Not particularly. There is some intermarriage of Christian Filipinos with the pagans. Also, Angel may have some Chinese blood, which would account for the unusually high cheekbones and rather flat face. He

doesn't have the Mongoloid eye fold which gives the appearance of slant eyes, but that means nothing. Many Filipinos with Chinese blood lack it."

"What are the Filipinos, anyway?" Scotty asked as they walked to the door.

"Originally, the Filipinos were of almost pure Malay blood. But there was much intermarriage with the Chinese and the Spanish, and now, particularly around Manila, *mestizos,* which is what persons of mixed race are called, are very common."

Tony hailed a taxi at the door and the boys went to their room. Rick had put a thread across the bottom of the casement window. It was not disturbed, nor was the chair he had carefully placed so that anyone coming through the door would move it slightly. There had been no prowlers while they were at breakfast.

The boys opened the case containing the earth scanner and lifted out the leather carrying cases which contained the electronic controls and amplifiers and the delicate scanning tube. They carried the cases down to the lobby and took a cab to the airport.

The ride was pleasant, since the way to the airport was along Dewey Boulevard, which edged Manila Bay. Far across the bay they could see the American Naval Station at Cavite. And to the north was Mariveles Mountain on Bataan Peninsula.

Here and there the sail of a banca dotted the brown water. In the bancas—outrigger canoes—were fishermen. A large part of the Filipino diet was fish.

The highway branched away from the bay finally, and a short time later they arrived at the modern airport, once the American Air Corps base of Nichols Field.

The Sky Wagon was as they had left it, apparently undisturbed. But they were not taking anything for granted. Rick and Scotty checked the plane over literally inch by inch, searching for signs of tampering.

As Rick examined the landing struts, a shadow fell across the doorway. He looked up to see an American watching him.

The American stepped forward. He was of medium height, with close cropped sandy hair. He wore a yellow T shirt under a white linen coat. His trousers were gray rayon, and his footgear was openwork sandals. He looked comfortable and cool, even in the broiling Philippine sun. Rick judged him to be about forty years old.

"Mind if I look?" the man asked.

"Not at all," Rick answered politely. He hesitated, then introduced himself and Scotty, who had come around from the other side of the plane.

"My name is Nast. James Nast. You must be two of the scientific party I read about in the Manila *Bulletin.*"

"I didn't know anything about us had been in the papers," Rick replied.

"This morning," Nast said. He took a tabloid-size paper from his pocket, unfolded it to the item, and handed it to them.

The item was brief. It merely stated that a party headed by Dr. Anthony Briotti, with Mr. Richard Brant

and Mr. Donald Scott, had been entertained by the Assistant Secretary of the Interior at dinner prior to their departure to Mountain Province to search for primitive artifacts. Dr. Okola, of the University of the Philippines, local adviser to the American party, also had attended the dinner.

"Lazada must have given that to the press," Rick remarked.

"Probably," Nast agreed. "Filipino politicos are like our own. They live on publicity. Please don't let me intrude. I came to the airport to meet a shipment from Hong Kong, but the plane is late, so I've been wandering around sightseeing."

"Are you in business?" Scotty asked.

"Yes. Import-export. I import Chinese silver, both alloyed and pure, and have it fabricated by Filipinos. Mostly into filigree work. Then I export it to America. I also import Siamese and Indo-Chinese silks which are made into all sorts of things and then exported to America. I was expecting a silk shipment this morning. My agent in Hong Kong gets it from Siam and Indo-China, and forwards it."

"Been out here long?" Rick inquired.

"Since the war. I first came here when I was in the Navy. Liked it so well I took my discharge here and stayed. Going to be in Manila long?"

"Just a few hours." Rick wiped sweat from his face. "We're going to Baguio."

"So am I. Perhaps I'll see you there."

"Really? What's Baguio like?"

"Plenty of local color. And the weather is great. It's high in the mountains and very cool. You'll sleep under blankets tonight, and so will I." Nast wiped his face, too. "This shipment goes by truck to Baguio, and I'm going to ride along with it." He wiped his face again.

"Why don't you take your coat off?" Scotty asked.

Nast grinned. "Because I've got a .38 automatic in a shoulder holster."

The boys stiffened. Rick and Scotty exchanged glances.

"The road to Baguio isn't the safest in the world," Nast explained. "It's fairly peaceful now, but bandits still operate up through Pampanga Province. I carry a gun to discourage interest in my shipments."

Now that he had mentioned it, Rick could see the bulge of the shoulder holster. But it was a good job of tailoring and he realized that the linen jacket had been made to conceal the shoulder gun.

"The plane from Hong Kong won't be in for at least a half hour," Nast said. "Mind if I stick around? It's a pleasure to talk to Americans. I deal mostly with Filipinos out in the *barrios*, the small towns where my fabricating is done, and I don't see Americans very often."

"Glad to have you, if you don't mind our going ahead with our work," Rick told him.

"Don't let me get in the way. Go right ahead."

The boys did so, and Rick explained the fine points of the Sky Wagon to Nast while he worked to check every possible point of sabotage. He liked talking about the plane. It was something to be proud of. And Nast was an interested listener who apparently knew something about planes.

After the check up, they rolled the plane outside and Rick warmed up the engine. Then, while he was testing the radio, Angel Manotok arrived with a truck. Rick immediately shut the engine off and got out, curious to see what Angel had found. Scotty was already looking it over, with Nast an interested spectator. Rick introduced him to Angel, then asked:

"Is it in good condition?"

"Very good. The man said it had been overhauled recently, and I believe him. The tires are in good condition and there are two spares."

The truck was a typical Army vehicle with double rear wheels, both front and rear drive, and a winch on the front. The motor purred sweetly. Angel had apparently done well.

Nast asked, "Going to use both the truck and the plane? Or will you leave the plane at Baguio?"

"We're not sure," Rick said. "Depends on whether we find a landing place at Bontoc. Have you been there?"

"A few times. There are no decent fields. But you could land on the road. It's black top, and there are few power lines or phone lines. I think you can do it."

"Glad to hear that," Rick said, relieved. To Scotty and Angel he said, "We can go on back to the hotel and load the truck. We'll have to check the plane engine before take-off, anyway."

"Think the plane will be safe?" Scotty asked.

"Sure. We'll put it in the hangar and lock the door. I notice the airport guards go by pretty often, and besides, the plane has been all right so far."

"I guess you're right," Scotty agreed. "But let's put the alarm out, anyway."

The alarm was a very loud horn wired into a circuit which caused it to go off if the plane was so much as touched. Rick set it, then locked the door of the plane. Removing the key from the lock activated the circuit. Then they closed and locked the hangar door. The plane would be all right.

Nast was talking to Angel Manotok in Tagalog. Angel was replying, but not very enthusiastically.

Rick spoke up. "You speak the local language pretty well, Mr. Nast."

"Have to," Nast said cheerfully. "The Filipino families that work for me can't speak English, often as not. Well, good hunting. Perhaps we'll meet in Baguio."

The boys shook hands. "Good luck to you. Hope your shipment arrives."

"It will. The planes from Hong Kong are often late. The airport there is closed in half the time from fog. Good luck."

The boys got into the truck with Angel and he drove out to the main highway.

"What where you and Nast talking about?" Scotty asked.

Angel took his time about answering. "He just wanted to know when we were going to Baguio. I think he was making small talk. Maybe he wanted to show off his Tagalog."

"Was his Tagalog good?" Rick asked.

"Yes. Very good."

Angel said no more, and Rick wondered for a moment. What had Nast really said? He decided that it wasn't of any importance. Perhaps Nast was one of those Americans who always talk to people of other lands in a half-insulting way. Rick had met them—and mighty poor advertisements for America they were.

They parked the truck behind the hotel and took Angel to their room. "We'll get help and have the crates carried down for you." Rick said.

Angel grinned. "Why bother? You two take one and I'll take the other."

The boys looked at each other. True, the crates weren't huge, but each was a hefty load for two men.

"Stop bragging," Scotty said. The jocular tone of his voice made a playful challenge of the words.

Angel took the challenge. He went to the largest crate, swung it easily to his head, and balanced it with one hand. "Let's go," he said, grinning.

Scotty stepped forward, blood in his eye, and tackled

the second crate. He got it up, but it was obvious that it was too much of a load even for his above-normal strength. Rick lent a hand and they carried the crate along behind Angel, who walked as though he had a feather pillow balanced on his head.

"Manotok the Mighty," Scotty said, and there was genuine awe in his voice.

Angel pronounced his name in the Spanish style, *Ahng-hel,* but now he shifted to the English pronunciation and said, "I'm an angel, and my strength is as the strength of ten, because my heart is pure."

The boys laughed. "That was first applied to Galahad, wasn't it?" Rick asked.

"Don't know," Angel replied. "But I like it, anyway."

The crates took up little room in the truck. Angel lashed them in, then the three went to the main dining room to meet Tony. They had time for a glass of limeade before the scientist showed up. He came to the table and asked, "Do you know a man by the name of Nast?"

Rick's eyebrows went up. "Yes. Met him this morning. Why?"

"He left a phone message at the desk. Wants you to call him."

Rick rose and went to the lobby, puzzled. What could Nast want? He got the number Nast had left. It turned out to be the freight office at the airport. Then there was a wait while the man was paged. At last he came to the phone.

"Brant? . . . Nast here. Look, I'm terribly sorry to impose on such short acquaintance, but I want to ask a favor. My shipment came in, but now I can't get a truck. The one I usually ship on has a regular run, and the driver took off for Baguio without checking. So I'm stranded. If you haven't too much of a load, could I ride along with your Filipino driver? My shipment weighs only two hundred pounds."

Rick considered. Nothing in the truck would be in any danger. The earth scanner was safely stowed in the luggage compartment of the plane.

Nast added, "I'll be glad to pay for the trip. It will save me waiting over until tomorrow."

"No need," Rick said. "We'll be glad to accommodate you. Meet you at the hangar in an hour." He hung up, very thoughtful. Why should his instincts rebel against doing Nash such a small favor? Again he told himself that no harm could come of it. Even if Nast were finger-man for a bandit gang he would get nothing except clothes and ordinary, easily replaced tools. And it was ridiculous to imagine the American as any such thing. True, he was not an educated man, but that meant less than nothing. Education, as such, has little to do with honesty. No, Nast was just an American sailor who had decided to stay in the tropics, and apparently was making a go of it in a business way.

"Let him ride," Rick thought. "It will be okay. He can't do any damage, I guess . . ."

CHAPTER VI

Chahda Checks In

RICK had expected the flight to Baguio to be a snap, but as it turned out, he had to call for help. Angel Manotok carried the three Spindrifters to the airport in the truck, Rick and Scotty riding behind, then Angel departed for Baguio with Nast and his bundle of silks.

Rick checked in at the Philippine Aeronautics Commission, seeking information on the airport at Baguio. He took one look at the approach pattern and gulped. The approach was between high mountains, down a valley, and then up a mountainside. What made it worse was that one mountain looked much like another on the topographical map.

He exclaimed, "Boy!" That's a rugged landing field to find!"

The Filipino official smiled. "You have maybe Navy flying experience?"

"No. Why?"

"Best experience for landing at Baguio is making landings on aircraft carrier."

"Thanks," Rick said. "Any advice?"

"Yes. Go to Philippine Air Lines. Talk to flight dispatcher. PAL flight leaves here maybe two hours. Just right for you. Fly to rendezvous. Pretty soon along comes PAL flight and you follow in."

The advice was good, Rick realized. He could not do better than follow a regular air-line flight into the field. He did as directed, met the pilot of the next Baguio flight, a former Filipino pilot in the United States Air Force, and was told the approximate time the PAL flight would pass the Kennon Road horseshoe curve for the Baguio approach.

"Follow the Kennon Road," the pilot advised. "Pick me up when I go over the curve. You can't mistake the place. Nothing else like it."

While Rick made arrangements, Tony and Scotty loaded their personal suitcases into the luggage compartment with the earth scanner. Scotty started the engine and checked the plane, so that it was warm when Rick arrived. They took off at once and headed north across the great central plain of Luzon.

The landscape below was flat, cut up by creeks and estuaries. It was perfect rice country. Later they passed Mount Arayat, once the hide-out of the Hukbalahap—the lawless forces that had been such a threat to Philip-

pine stability. Ahead of them rose the mountains of northern Luzon. Within those mountains they would find Baguio and Mountain Province.

Rick picked up the Kennon Road without trouble as it wound its way through the foothills. Staying high, he followed it until he reached a great switchback curve. A car following that road would literally double back on itself, he thought. He glanced at his watch. The PAL plane would be along in about two minutes. The pilot had estimated Rick's flying time perfectly. Rick climbed, then circled until Scotty saw the twin-engine transport approaching.

The PAL pilot waggled his wings, and Rick followed as the air liner throttled down, swung between mountain peaks, and threaded its way down a wide valley. Rick gulped. A good thing he had had the experienced pilot to follow. He would never have found the way alone. The peaks were completely confusing to someone who had never seen them before.

The air liner turned suddenly and Rick's heart leaped into his throat. He thought the PAL plane was flying right into the mountainside. But such was not the case. The plane settled down on a landing strip that had been hewn from a mountaintop. It was obvious what the PAL official had meant when he joked about carrier landings.

Rick followed the PAL plane in, and had to fight down his instinctive feeling to gain altitude when he

saw the mountainside rushing at him. He nearly overshot the landing strip. But then the Sky Wagon was down, and he taxied toward the control station.

Scotty wiped his brow. "Some field!"

"Next time will be okay," Rick replied. "But this time I aged ten years."

The Filipino pilot walked to meet them, grinning. "How do you like Baguio airport?"

"I've landed on fields I liked better," Rick replied. "Thanks for leading us in."

"You're welcome. I remember my first landing. Couldn't fly again for a week. All I could think of was spreading my passengers all over the hillside. But only the first time is hard. We fly in and out of here several times a day, and we've never had a serious accident."

"Your air line doesn't go in for accidents," Tony Briotti said. "You have a remarkable safety record."

"We do our best," the pilot said. "Going into town? I am. I have a car behind the control shack. Be glad to give you a lift."

"Thanks a million," Rick answered. "First I have to make arrangements for my plane."

The pilot grinned. "None to make. No hangars, no service except gas. Just stake it down and lock the door. It will be all right."

It had to be all right. There was nothing else to do. The Spindrifters took the earth scanner and their personal luggage, then locked the plane, leaving the alarm

activated. As an afterthought, Rick left a duplicate key with the Filipino field official. Someone might touch it casually and set the alarm off, and it would sound until the door was unlocked and relocked again with the key. He explained how it worked and then joined the pilot and his friends in the official air-line car.

The pilot dropped them at Muller's, a combination boardinghouse and old-fashioned inn. They checked in, then climbed a nearby hill for a view of Baguio.

As far as the eye could see, there were mountains. Steep ridges and deep clefts made a picturesque jumble of the landscape. Beyond, over the ridge, was the Trinidad Valley, a farm garden area where the American colony of the Philippines got most of its temperate zone vegetables and fruit. On the other side of town was the Golden Bowl of Benguet, where fabulous gold mines were worked by Igorot miners clad only in breechcloths and hard-rock helmets.

Baguio itself was a modern city in most respects. But the population—a strange mixture of Christian Filipinos and primitive, pagan Igorots—was unusual. The Filipinos wore typical Western dress, and actually dressed pretty warmly. The Igorot men wore the breechcloth, perhaps with a shirt or sweater, perhaps with nothing at all. Most of the men had tiny pillbox caps of woven straw on the backs of their heads. The little round boxes were decorated with such oddments as boar's tusks and coke bottle caps. The Igorot women

wore a tight-fitting skirt of colorful wool, usually patterned in red or yellow. They wore blouses of embroidered white cotton, or jackets of colored wool. Their skirts had balls of yarn on the hips. The women wore no hats. Both sexes were usually barefoot.

There were contrasts. For example, next to a great Christian cathedral was the Igorot dog market. The Igorots were eaters of dog meat.

But it was not the Igorots or the mountains that had made Baguio famous and turned it into the summer capital of the Philippines—it was the climate. While Manila burned in the tropical sun, Baguio, thousands of feet higher, had cool, fall-like weather. There was hardly a night during the year when blankets were not comfortable. Even the foliage was temperate rather than tropical. Baguio had pine trees, a welcome sight to the Spindrift trio.

There was a tall, fragrant pine just outside the window of the room shared by Rick and Scotty. When the boys returned to their rooms to wash up for an early dinner, Rick leaned out and broke off a pine cone. Then, by reaching only a bit further, he grabbed a cluster of purple-red blossoms from a bougainvillea vine that had climbed the tree to their second-floor height.

In the comfortable dining room, they chose a table in front of a roaring fireplace, glad of the warmth. It was chilly in Baguio. While they waited to be served,

Rick mentioned the pine tree to Tony and commented that it was odd that a tree should be left so close to a building.

"The forest practices of the Igorots and Ifugaos could well be copied by us," Tony told the boys. "Anyone who cuts down a tree for anything other than genuine use is severely punished. In the old days the punishment might have been loss of his head. That's how much respect they have for their water supply, which is dependent directly on their forests."

"You talk as though these were civilized people," Scotty commented.

Tony grinned. "Depends on what you call civilization. But they have a very highly developed and complex culture. They have a history, too, which they know better than we know ours. For instance, an Ifugao can recite his ancestry as far back as twenty-five generations. Can you?"

"Not sure I'd want to," Scotty retorted. "Might be a few horse thieves along the way. Seriously, I see what you mean."

"Their priests must know all about fifteen hundred different gods and all the legends and taboos connected with each. No written books to consult, either. All must be memorized."

"That certainly proves that they have good memories," Rick said. "I'm not sure what else it proves."

"Wait until you see the rice terraces. Now let's order dinner. This cool air has whetted my appetite like a razor's edge."

After a delicious meal of broiled steak, fresh vegetables from Trinidad Valley, and the huge strawberries for which the valley is famous, the three lingered over coffee and Tony recited more details of the Igorot and Ifugao way of life, so different from their own. In the midst of the recital Angel Manotok arrived.

"Good trip?" Rick asked.

"Yes. No trouble. The truck is a beauty. What do you want me to do now?"

Rick handed him the keys to their room. "You're pretty dusty. Wash up, eat, then go to the airport. You'll find a spare bedroll in the crate you carried by yourself back at the Manila Hotel. Keep an eye on the plane, and we'll join you at breakfast time."

Although there was no reason to suspect that anyone would harm the plane, none of them felt comfortable about leaving it unguarded. They were sure it would be safe during the daylight hours, but darkness afforded an opportunity for sabotage.

Angel took the keys and went on his way. In a short time he returned, gave the keys back to Rick, and said, "I'll get supper at a Filipino place. See you in the morning."

"Businesslike," Tony said approvingly. "No waste words or motion. I think we were lucky to get him."

The boys agreed. "Wonder how he and Nast got along?" Rick queried. "I forgot to ask him."

"He probably dropped off Nast and his silks before he came here," Scotty commented.

At Tony's suggestion they walked around town, taking in the interesting marketplace, the several cathedrals, the summer palace of the Philippines president, and the parks. Baguio was different—and very peaceful and pleasant. As they walked, they discussed their plans for the next day.

Rick and Tony were to fly to Bontoc, which was still in Igorot country, then cross the mountain to Banaue, which was the objective of the trip, land of the Ifugaos and home of the fabled rice terraces. It was to be a nonstop trip, mostly to familiarize Rick with the terrain. At the same time, Scotty and Angel were to go by truck to Bontoc, several hours' drive to the north. They would remain overnight. If Scotty could arrange a landing place for the Sky Wagon, he would phone Rick at Muller's. Then Rick and Tony would fly up the next morning. Scotty was a pilot himself, so he knew the requirements for a good landing strip.

If no suitable landing place were available, Rick and Tony would hire a jeep and drive to Bontoc. Jeeps were common in the Philippines, since they were ideal vehicles for the back country. Hiring one would present no problems.

With no landing place available, the Sky Wagon

would not come into use until the expedition found artifacts of value. Then Rick would return to Baguio, get the plane, pick up the discoveries by cable, and deliver the stuff to Okola in Manila for safekeeping and preliminary examination.

The exercise and the cool freshness of the air made them sleepy, and presently, by mutual consent, they returned to Muller's.

"Might as well get to bed early," Tony said. "Then we can be up at dawn and get off to an early start. Good night, boys."

The boys bade him good night and went to their own room, a few doors down the hall. Scotty unlocked the door and swung it open, then let out a yell of joy. Chahda was sprawled on one of the beds, reading a magazine!

The Hindu boy was dressed in Western clothes, slacks and a sports jacket.

He looked up as the door opened. "Hi," he said casually. "Nice walk?"

It was as though they had left him reading while they went for a stroll. Chahda's casualness was too much for Rick and Scotty. They dove for him, hauled him out of the bed, and pummeled him with sheer delight. Finally Chahda yelled for mercy.

"I give in! Plenty okay! I glad to see you, too. Please do not break leg, may need it."

"You no-good swami," Scotty said. "What's the idea of playing Sikh?"

The boys sat down on the bed opposite Chahda.

"Talk," Rick commanded. "What kind of gag is this?"

"Best way to learn about people is to be one of them," Chahda said with dignity. "I have been Filipino and Sikh. Now I become Igorot. First I learned about this new country from Alm-in-ack. Says this largest group in Malay Archipelago. What is archipelago, please?"

Rick saw the twinkle in Chahda's eye and knew that their friend was following his usual custom of teasing them. "Archy Pelago is the black sheep of the Pelago family," he said. "Archy first fell from grace when he got into a fight with neighbors. It was a real melee. Hence his nickname. Melee Archy Pelago . . ."

A pillow caught him in the face, smothering his words. Scotty pushed him over on the bed and sat on him.

"Come on, Chahda. I'm so curious I could spring a seam. What's going on?"

Rick squirmed, got nowhere, and finally sank his teeth into Scotty hard enough to get results. Scotty let out a yell that could have been heard in Singapore.

Tony Briotti pounded on the door and called, "How do you expect the paying guests to sleep with that racket going on?"

The boys let him in and introduced Chahda. Tony shook hands with the Hindu boy. "I was beginning to believe you were a figment of the well-known Spindrift imagination. It's a pleasure to meet you."

"Likewise am honored to meet brilliant young scien-

tist," Chahda said politely. "My worthless friends tell me they even call you by nickname, while other scientists are called by title. This is mark of high esteem, I think. Glad to meet you, *Sahib* Tony."

"Chahda was just going to give us the low-down," Rick said.

"That what the yelling was about?" Tony asked.

"Scotty yelled," Rick said. "Mosquito bit him."

"That mosquito is going to get swatted when he least expects it," Scotty promised. "Come on, Chahda. Spin us a yarn."

"Okay." Chahda sat cross-legged on Rick's bed. "You know I went to Manila Hotel. For three days I waited. Then one day I sit next to famous Assistant Secretary of Exterior."

"Interior," Rick corrected. "Lazada."

"Yes. Soon he is met by a friend who sits with him. This friend is not known to me then. But I listen. I hear Lazada's friend say that soon come Americans who will desec— What is ruin religious things, please?"

"Desecrate," Tony supplied.

"Yes. Do that to sacred Ifugao things. This friend begs Lazada not to give permit."

The three Spindrifters were sitting on the edges of the beds now, concentrating on every word.

"Friend says Americans will dig up rice terraces, looking for gold. Sacred objects of gold will be carried away, and earth-cokes and drafts will fall on Ifugao people."

"Earthquakes and droughts," Rick corrected.

"That is what I said," Chahda nodded. "Lazada objects that these are not real gold things, and the friend says they are. Real gold. Much gold. All very sacred. Again he begs Lazada not to allow this sacker-ledge."

"Sacrilege."

"Yes. Anyway, Lazada says Americans have much influence. He does not know if he can stop them. But he will try. I do not believe he talks truth. His looks do not make me trust him. You know?"

The boys knew.

"When friend leaves, I think I follow him. He starts out, then he meets American on steps of hotel. I get close and listen. He says to American, how you like to add gold to your smuggle into China?"

Rick whistled. He had heard that smuggling gold from the Philippines into China was big business.

"American says plenty like. Where is gold? Lazada says we not talk here, you come to my house tonight—no, tomorrow. Got big official dinner tonight, and there is plenty time. Then I decide I must know more. So I go to Number One Sikh in Manila and tell him he has new strong boy to be guard at Lazada's, after I make sure Lazada has Sikh guards. This is arranged. No trouble."

Chahda always made it sound dramatic but easy, Rick thought. He doubted that it was as simple as the Hindu boy made out.

"American comes, and I am not able to hear much of

talk. But I get American's name. You know him. Since this morning."

"Nast!" Rick exclaimed.

"Yes. Also comes to Lazada's house the Filipino friend, but he is not Filipino. He is Ifugao. About him I do not know, except that he is called No Palate. Or something like that. I would like to follow him, but I think better I stay with Lazada. Good thing, too, because Nast comes again, and this time I listen. Lazada tells Nast first to meet you, so you will know and trust him. Then Nast is to get in touch with No Palate. Lazada says he has told No Palate that he cannot keep permit from you, but that American friend will help keep you from digging up Ifugao sacred things."

Chahda shrugged. "What am I to do? I stop being Sikh. My Number One Sikh buddy-chum helps me meet Igorot who used to be scout for constabulary. Name of Dog Meat. Fine name, huh? Dog Meat will help. I hire him. Need helper named Dog Meat for sure." He grinned.

The boys chuckled, and Tony explained, "That is actually a very honorable name. Dog meat is a ceremonial meat among the Igorots."

"Best reason I've heard for hiring anyone in a long time," Rick commented.

Chahda continued, "This morning I try to catch you at Manila, but reach hotel too late, then reach airport too late. But I do some watching, and I find out man

with same describing as Nast has been visiting with you at airport. You already gone. Nast already gone. Dog Meat and me, we take next PAL plane to Baguio. When get here, there is your Sky Wagon. At least I think it is yours, because it is like you told me in your letter. So I come here, but not come directly to room, because I think maybe better I stay undercover. So climb tree and come in window."

The Hindu boy made a gesture of "all done." "Next time you see me, I be Ifugao. Or maybe Igorot. Maybe even Kalinga." He named another related pagan group. "Will decide when I see what is to be did. But already have name." He smiled blandly. "Name myself for Scotty."

Rick moved out of the line of fire.

Chahda bowed. "Meet Cow Brain."

Scotty reached for him. Tony and Rick ducked.

CHAPTER VII

Igorot Country

Rick and Scotty awoke the next morning with a feeling of well-being. After the heat of Manila the cool air of Baguio had caused them to sleep like logs. Also, things appeared to be going well, and Chahda finally had contacted them.

The contact had been a brief one. Chahda had gone, promising to keep in touch with them as best he could. The Hindu boy was on the trail of James Nast, hoping that by keeping close watch he could anticipate, and perhaps prevent, any action Nast might try to take against the Spindrift party.

"Dog Meat," Rick said, grinning, as the two knocked on Tony Briotti's door. "It may be a fine old ceremonial name in this part of the world, but to me it's just a meal for Dismal."

Dismal was the Brant family pup. When Rick thought of the pagans eating dog, he always thought of Dismal served up as a roast, and the thought made him ill. He

had decided that he might admire the fine qualities of the Igorot and Ifugao people, but the mental image of Dismal among the poor, beaten mongrels in the dog market would always keep him from being really fond of them.

Tony failed to answer the door. "Probably gone down to breakfast already," Scotty said. He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Chahda won't have much trouble finding Nast. Baguio isn't very big and there aren't very many Americans. Wonder what Nast will try to do?"

Rick shrugged. "How can we guess? There are so many things about this part of the world we don't know. He might have two dozen slick tricks up his sleeve. The best thing we can do is be on guard all the time. I'm glad we sent Angel out to guard the plane."

As they passed the hotel desk, the clerk hailed them. "Mr. Brant? A message for you."

"Probably from Chahda," Rich said. But he was wrong. The note was from Tony, and it made Rick's eyes widen. He read it aloud:

" 'Dear boys. Woke up at dawn with something nagging at me. It broke through my thick skull while I was having coffee. The Ifugao No Palate must be Nangolat. It's the name Okola mentioned—his prize student. I know of no other Ifugao with even a less remote connection. Also, the shape of Angel's face bothers me. I am going to the airport on a hunch. Be back about eight, with Angel.' "

Scotty pointed to a wall clock. It was nearly nine o'clock. They had slept late.

The two boys, without a word, ran for the door. Outside the hotel a Filipino taxi waited. They jumped in and gasped in one voice: "Baguio Airport!"

"The chucklehead," Scotty groaned. "Why didn't he wake us up? Why did he have to go alone?"

"Relax," Rick said, but he didn't really mean it. "It was just an idea he had that this Ifugao might be tied up with Angel. After all, Okola recommended Angel." He recognized the fallacy in his argument as soon as the words were out, but Scotty was already pointing to it.

"Yes. Angel is Okola's boy, and so is this Nangolat. What's more likely than their being close friends? Angel could be giving Nangolat a helping hand."

The taxi climbed the winding streets of Baguio, passed the American military rest camp and the Baguio residence of the American ambassador, and finally entered the airport.

One quick look around the field showed them that the truck was missing. The Sky Wagon was waiting by itself. On Rick's quick instructions the taxi raced to the plane. They got out and took a quick look.

"No sign of damage," Scotty said. "Let's ask at the airport office."

The office was closed. It was operated by Philippine Air Lines, and was only kept open during the day, start-

ing one hour before the day's first flight to Manila or from the big city. The first flight on this day was not until ten thirty.

A pair of workmen with shovels were scratching listlessly at the gravel on the opposite side of the field. The boys jumped into the taxi and told the driver to cross the field.

Rick leaned out. "Did you see a truck?"

The men smiled and nodded.

"How long ago?" Rick called.

The men smiled some more, then shrugged.

The Filipino cab driver spoke to them in Ilokano, the Christian dialect of the province. They answered briefly, smiled at the boys again, and went back to scratching at the gravel. Apparently they were supposed to be leveling the shoulders of the runway. If so, the shoulders would be stooped with age before they were finished.

The Filipino cab driver turned to the boys. "Sir, these men not see truck. They be here since maybe two hours. No truck."

"But they said they did!" Scotty exclaimed.

Rick interrupted, "Ask them if they saw an American, alone."

The driver exchanged quick syllables with the workmen. "They see American. He get in sedan which waiting for him, and go off."

"Who was in the sedan?"

Again the driver translated. "They not see. It on other

side of field. Only know maybe three men, maybe American, maybe Filipino. They not know."

"Take us back to the hotel," Rick commanded. "And thanks for interpreting for us."

"They said they saw the truck," Scotty insisted.

Rick shook his head. "Remember what Tony once told us. Never ask a question that can be answered yes or no, or the answer will be yes whether that's the answer or not. That's as true in the Philippines as it is in China or anywhere else in the Orient. I don't think they saw the truck, but I'm sure they did see Tony go off in a sedan. I'm worried, Scotty."

"Same. Of course the men in the sedan could just have offered Tony a lift back to the hotel."

"What were they doing at the airport? The sign on the office door said the first flight from Manila was at ten thirty. No one uses the field but PAL, a few travelers like us, and maybe military planes."

"I don't believe he just got a lift. But it's a possibility."

"We'll soon know," Rick said. "Driver, please hurry."

The Filipino grinned. "Sor, would like to please customer. But hurry on these roads is break the necks, I think so."

"He's right," Scotty agreed. "We'll get there soon enough."

Within a few moments they were back at the hotel. Rick paid the driver and thanked him for the help, then

they ran in and confronted the clerk. "Is Dr. Briotti back?"

"I haven't seen him, gentlemen. Just a moment please." The clerk looked in Tony's box. "His key is not here. Have you called his room?"

"Not yet. Would you have seen him if he came in?" Rick asked.

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. I've been doing some paper work, and unless he came to the desk, I might not notice him."

The boys nodded their thanks and hurried up the stairs to Tony's room. They tried the door, then knocked loudly. There was no answer. They knocked again, waited, then stared at each other bleakly.

"Now what?" Rick had a feeling that Tony was in danger. He didn't know why he felt that way when the only news they had was that he had gone off in a sedan with three men. The workmen hadn't said that he had fought, or that he had been pulled into the car. He voiced his thoughts as he followed Scotty to their room.

"That means nothing," Scotty pointed out. "He probably wouldn't argue with a gun pointing out the window at him. The workmen probably wouldn't have noticed a pistol barrel."

"You're right, as usual. Well, what now?"

"Call the cops?"

"What would we say? Tony hasn't been gone more

than an hour or two, so far as we know. That's not reason enough to call the cops. We couldn't tell them about Chahda and what he said. They wouldn't believe any such stories about their Assistant Secretary of the Interior, and if they did, they'd probably be afraid to do much about it. If Tony doesn't show up in another hour or two, we probably ought to call the police. But not yet."

Scotty had worn a jacket because the morning was cool. But now the room was warm, and he went to the closet to hang it up.

"Hey, Tony must have taken the earth scanner with him."

Rick was in the act of sitting down on his bed. He bounced up like a rubber ball. "What? He couldn't have!"

"Well, it's gone. And who else would have taken it?"

"Tony didn't. He hasn't been in this room, except last night when Chahda was here, and he didn't take the scanner then."

Scotty snapped his fingers. "You gave Angel your key and told him to clean up!"

Rick slumped down on the bed again. That was it, of course. It had to be. No one else had had the chance to get the equipment, barring the possibility that the hotel personnel were dishonest, and there was no reason to suspect them.

"Then the equipment went with him last night. And

we didn't notice until now. But we would have noticed if it had been gone, wouldn't we? I've been to the closet a dozen times and so have you."

"Means nothing. I don't know why I noticed just now that the stuff was gone. But there was nothing to call our attention to it last night or this morning. Anyway, it was behind my big suitcase—I know. I knocked the suitcase over when I closed the closet door this morning, and I didn't stop to pick it up. It's still on its side. That's why I noticed that the earth scanner wasn't there."

"If we needed any proof that Angel is a bad one, probably in cahoots with Nangolat, we have it. Scotty, what are we going to do?"

"Call the cops," Scotty said grimly. "Now we have a theft to report." He strode for the phone, but before he could pick it up there was a sharp ring. Scotty answered. "Yes?" He listened, hung up hastily, and turned to Rick.

"The clerk says there's a Filipino in the lobby who wants to see us. Says he knows us."

"Chahda! It must be. He's posing as a pagan of some kind, and we don't know any other Filipinos."

Rick's thoughts were expressed as he and Scotty ran down the hall, then took the stairs four at a time.

"That's not Chahda!" Scotty pointed to a big Filipino who was striding back and forth in front of the desk. The man was Scotty's size, and built in about the same proportions. Around his head was what at first glance

appeared to be a kind of turban. At second glance the boys saw that it was a thick bandage.

The Filipino saw them and came toward them with quick strides. His face probably was pleasant most of the time, but now it was grim, his mouth creased in lines of pain.

"Mr. Brant and Mr. Scott?"

"Yes," Rick said. "And you . . ."

"I am Angel Manotok!" the Filipino said.

CHAPTER VIII

The Bontoc Road

"Dr. Okola instructed me in what I was to do," the real Angel Manotok said. "Nangolat was present. He was very helpful. He even gave me the name of an Ifugao priest who would help us. A man by the name of Poison."

Angel didn't seem to think the name was odd, so Rick said nothing.

"I live alone," Angel continued. "I went home that evening to pack my stuff, so I would be ready to go to the hotel to meet you early in the morning. Nangolat was waiting, and he had a gun. He made me turn around, then he said, 'Angel, I am sorry. I only do this for the good of my people, not for myself.' There was a great blow on the back of my head and I knew nothing more. I woke up in the St. Luke Hospital. They said I had a fractured skull, at first. But they were wrong."

"Thank heavens," Rick said. "You were lucky."

"So lucky," Angel agreed. "What I can never know is

why Nangolat did not take my head. Before, I thought he was very civilized and intelligent. But when I saw him in my nipa hut, he was crazy. He did not talk crazy, but he was. It was in his eyes. When I saw him and the gun in his hand, and then I saw his eyes, I knew I was dead. But I did not know why, because he was my friend."

"Do you know why now?" Scotty asked.

"No. It does not matter. It only matters that he was my friend and he gave me no chance. He did not fight me, although we are evenly matched. He struck me from behind. I will go with you now to the Ifugao country, and perhaps we will find this Nangolat. When I find him I will know what to do."

Angel's tone was not angry, nor did he sound as though he were threatening. It was as though he had said that tomorrow it would rain. But Rick and Scotty decided that they would not like to be in Nangolat's shoes.

"Did you tell Dr. Okola?" Scotty asked.

For the first time, Angel's eyes fell. "No. I was ashamed to him."

Rick recognized the odd phrase as a literal translation of a Spanish idiom. He also understood why Angel had not told Okola. The Filipino archaeologist had entrusted the Americans to Angel's care, and Nangolat had taken his place. It didn't matter that Angel couldn't help it. He had lost face. He would not return to Okola until he had made amends.

"If your head was so badly hurt that the doctors thought your skull was fractured, I'm surprised that they let you out of the hospital," Rick said.

"They did not let me. I walked out. Then I caught rides until I got into Baguio a few minutes ago. If you had not been here, then I would have followed you to Bontoc."

Scotty asked, "Angel, what do you know of Mr. Irineo Lazada?"

Angel spat. "He has power. He has many friends. All his friends are thieves. Some are mighty thieves, but he is the greatest one of all. The Secretary, who is his boss, is a fine man, and he will believe no evil of this Lazada. No one will speak against him so the Secretary and President can hear, because if such words are spoken, the body of the speaker will be found floating down the Pasig next morning. This is understood by all, and those who have proof are afraid. I have no proof, or I would speak myself. To know is one thing. But to prove is another."

"Do you know an American named Nast?"

"Yes. He is a smuggler. Again, there is no proof. Sometimes the ones who smuggle for him are caught, but he is not, because he does no smuggling himself."

"What does he smuggle?" Rick asked. He was searching for some clue that might be useful.

"Anything. Chinese who cannot get visas to enter the Philippines. He brings many of them up from Borneo. Crude rubber. Gems from Siam. He used to run guns,

but the supply ran out. They were American war surplus guns, stolen by the truckload after the war and sold to smugglers like Nast. Now there are no more."

"What's Lazada's tie-up with Nast?"

Angel shrugged. "This is gossip. Lazada has a yacht. Who would search the private yacht of the great Assistant Secretary? Even though it was well known that the yacht had been to Macao or Hong Kong and was loaded with contraband?"

Rick swiftly outlined the events of the morning to Angel. "We must find Dr. Briotti," he concluded. "What do you suggest?"

Angel thought it over, now and then raising a hand gingerly to his bandaged head. "Everything Nast wants is in the Ifugao country, no? He can only want the gold, and it is there. When Dr. Okola told me of this golden skull you seek, I was afraid, for there are still many bad men in the Philippines who want gold. Now Nast is after it. Maybe others. I do not think Nangolat wants gold, but he is an Ifugao. Also, his interest is in the Ifugao country. It can be nowhere else."

Angel's English sometimes had a queer, rather formal phrasing, but it was clear. And so, apparently, were his thoughts. Rick accepted his idea about everything pointing to the Ifugao country.

"Then we should go to Ifugao."

"You have a plane. We should fly over the road to Bontoc and look for the truck and the sedan with Dr.

Briotti. If we see them, we can come back to Baguio and telephone. The road to Bontoc is one way only. Only one car at a time can travel."

"One way?" Scotty inquired. "You can't mean that. How would people get back and forth?"

"I am not clear," Angel apologized. "What I mean is the road is too narrow for cars going both ways. So the road has been divided in parts by gates. Maybe a car is going to Bontoc. It arrives at Gate One. The gatekeeper lets it through, then he calls Gate Two and says he has let a car come north. Maybe another car is going from Bontoc to Baguio. He reaches Gate Two, and the gatekeeper makes him wait until the car from Gate One reaches him. Then he lets the car to Baguio go through and calls the gatekeeper at Gate One and says a car is coming. Then he lets the car going to Bontoc go through his gate and he calls Gate Three and says that a car is coming."

"I see," Scotty nodded. "One gate at a time. A car might be able to go through three or four gates, and then have to wait for a car coming the other way."

"That is it. There are many gates. I forget exactly how many. Also, to get from Bontoc to Banaue there is a road with gates."

Banaue was in the Ifugao country, in the heart of the rice terraces. It was their destination.

"Let's go," Rick said.

He had worked out a plan. The plane could scout the

road quickly and easily. By air it was only a short distance to Bontoc, but by road it was several hours of driving because of the twists and turns. If they could spot the truck or a sedan with four men in it, they could return to Baguio and phone, and the vehicles could be held up at one of the many gates.

Scotty's thoughts were apparently the same, because Rick knew exactly what he meant when he said, "The sedan will give us trouble. We'll just have to hope that we can fly low when we see one, and try to catch a look at the people in it."

"That won't be very satisfactory," Rick said. "When we get to the airport, we'll have Angel pump those workmen some more. If they're still there. Like a pair of real meatheads, we forgot to ask for details, such as what color the sedan was."

They were fortunate. The workmen were still pecking away at the runway shoulders. And they did recall the color of the sedan. It was dark green. But they didn't know enough about cars to know the make, and they had noticed no special details.

"Have you flown before?" Rick asked Angel.

"Yes. But not in such a little plane. Only the big PAL planes."

The air-lines office was open now. Rick got his keys, arranged for gasoline, and they moved the Sky Wagon into position. There was plenty of gas for a short trip, but he was taking no chances. He wanted a full tank.

It took time to recheck the plane carefully, to make sure Nangolat had not sabotaged it. Then, finally, they were on their way. Scotty had a map spread across his knees and Angel had another. Scotty's map showed topographical details like the height of mountains and their contours. Angel had an excellent road map distributed by one of the American gasoline companies that maintained service stations in many parts of the islands.

Angel watched the roads and Scotty the mountains, and they got on the Bontoc Road with no trouble. Rick climbed until they could see for miles. It was the only way to follow the tortuous route of the road as it wound between mountains, hugged the side of high peaks, and dipped into forested valleys.

Now and then they could see an Igorot village far below, but this was mostly uninhabited country. On Scotty's map, not so far away, were great white patches marked with a single word: UNEXPLORED. It seemed incredible that after nearly fifty years of American Government and a few years of independence, the island of Luzon, seat of the capital, had unexplored areas. But it was true.

Rick knew that he need not watch the road carefully for a little while, except to follow it. If the truck and sedan were headed for Bontoc and Banaue they had a good start. He doubted that they were traveling together.

"You know," he said, "we're not so smart."

"I've always known it," Scotty replied. "But what have we done that's especially stupid?"

"We could have phoned the first gate and asked if the truck and sedan had passed through."

Scotty groaned. "You are so right!"

Angel spoke from the rear seat. "True, true! It is my fault. I am ashamed to you that I did not think of it."

Rick suspected that it hurt Angel to be so humble and admit that he was ashamed. He looked like a proud man, one used to holding his head high.

"We liked Nangolat," he said. "We thought he was Angel Manotok. He had all your papers. We didn't doubt him because he looked like a fine man. We were taken in, all right."

Angel seemed to cheer up a little. "Yes? Then perhaps you understand how it was easy for him to catch me and try to kill me when I also liked him and thought he was my friend."

"That's easy to understand," Scotty told the Filipino. "No one could blame you, Angel."

"You are good to say it," Angel replied. He seemed relieved.

Rick knew that they had made a friend by expressing their understanding. Before, Angel would have done his best because of Okola. Now, he thought, Angel would do his best because he knew they were friendly and understood how a man's pride can be hurt even when it is not his fault.

"We'd better start keeping an eye peeled," Scotty advised.

They flew in silence, inspecting the road below. There was almost no traffic. Since leaving Trinidad Valley they had seen only the Bontoc bus, a brilliant orange speck on the road below, and two jeeps. They had identified the gates easily. Once they passed a gate where a southbound panel truck waited. Rick knew that the truck driver couldn't know what kind of vehicle he waited for, but from the air it could be seen that the Bontoc bus was the only moving thing between the two gates.

The Sky Wagon was just above the tops of a series of mountain peaks and steep ridges. The road clung to the sides of the peaks like a dusty brown ribbon. Rick turned up the heater a little because it was cold at eight thousand feet.

Then he lost the road. So did Angel and Scotty. Astonished, Rick circled. He picked up the road again, followed it, lost it once more.

"Where does it go?" he wondered.

"Let's go see," Scotty suggested.

Rick examined the terrain. Their quarry might be on the lost section of the road. He had the choice of going down for a look, or finding where the road emerged and circle for a while. He elected to go down.

The Sky Wagon lost altitude in a long slip toward the valley floor. Rick and the others kept an eye on the point where the road vanished, and in a few moments

the mystery was solved. The road reached a cliff approximately a mile long and a half mile high. The road was about two thirds of the way up. To get past the cliff it had been necessary to cut a shelf into the cliff itself.

"Wow! Notching that cliff must have been some job!" Scotty exclaimed. "No wonder we couldn't see the road from the air."

Rick flew parallel to the cliff until he had to climb to get over a ridge. Below, the road emerged from the overhang and was clearly visible again. He gained altitude.

"Just had a happy thought," he said. "Wouldn't it be nice if the weather closed in? Here we are flying visual contact through some of the trickiest mountains I've ever seen. I'm going to keep an eye on the compass. You two concentrate on the road. If we do get weather, I want to be able to fly a reasonable course back to Baguio."

"Didn't you get a weather briefing at the airport?" Scotty asked.

"Yes. Such as it was. Mostly it was local Baguio conditions and a brief report on Manila."

"Something ahead," Angel called.

"I see it," Scotty answered. "A truck of some kind. Take a look, Rick."

Rick surveyed the landscape ahead, saw that he would not get into difficulty by losing altitude, and went

down for a look. He couldn't get closer than a thousand feet, but that was ample. It was a load of lumber, although the truck was much like theirs.

"What color is it?" Scotty asked.

"Hard to tell. Ours was gray. This one looks brown."

"Could be dust," Angel offered. "Dirt road below, plenty dusty. But there are lumber mills up in this part of the province. Perhaps that is just one of their trucks. You had no lumber, did you?"

"No. Our truck had only two crates on it. Besides, Angel—I mean Nangolat—must be far beyond this point. He left last night early."

"How do you know?" Angel asked curiously.

"Yeah," Scotty echoed. "You sound sure."

"He got the scanner, didn't he? There was a risk that we might find out that it was gone. He wouldn't hang around the airport knowing that we might find out about the theft, would he?"

"Good point," Scotty agreed.

"I heard of this earth scanner," Angel said. "Dr. Okola told me. It takes pictures of what is inside the ground, no?"

"Not exactly pictures," Scotty said. "It shows a kind of wave pattern. You'll see how it works."

Rick snorted. "Optimist. What makes you so sure?"

"We'll get it back," Scotty said calmly. "No smart Ifugao is going to do us in the eye, chum. Not without a fight. We'll find Tony and we'll find the scanner. Then

we'll clobber pal Nangolat—or let Angel do it—and get to work."

"What do we do with Nast?"

"We get nasty with Nast."

Rick groaned. "That pun, pal, is strictly cornball."

"I've always wanted to be a pun pal," Scotty said.

Far ahead, green shelves gave a regular pattern to the base of one mountain. Rick pointed them out to Angel. "What's that?"

"Igorot rice terraces."

"Igorot? I thought the rice terraces were Ifugao."

"The Igorots have them, too. They are not so— I don't have the word for it. Big, make one open the eyes in wonder, very fine. The kind of thing that makes you feel surprise here." Angel put his hand on his stomach.

"Breath-taking?" Scotty suggested. "Spectacular?"

"Yes. Both. These Igorot terraces are nothing. Wait until you see the terraces at Banaue."

Three pairs of eyes scanned the road ahead. It was deserted.

"Tell us about rice," Rick asked. "There was rice below when we flew to Baguio, too."

"Yes. A great deal of rice. You passed over Pampanga Province, which is called the rice bowl of the Philippines. That rice is grown in paddies, which are fields with little earth walls around them called dikes. The paddies can be flooded. Rice needs much water. Down there, though, the land is flat."

Scotty pointed to a razorback ridge. "This land sure isn't flat."

"No, but the Igorot and Ifugao workers make it flat by building terraces. Each terrace is like a little paddy. It can be flooded, just as the lowland paddies are. The water comes from the mountains in pipes made of bamboo."

"It must be quite a water system," Rick observed.

"Yes. There are miles of bamboo pipes, but no water is wasted. The water is put into the upper terraces, then it runs by itself through openings down to the lower terraces."

"Is the rice the same?"

"Nearly. There is another kind called highland rice that is planted like wheat. We have a little wheat, too, but not enough to feed many people. The highland rice is not very good. Paddy rice is better."

Rick was interested. He continued his questioning. "Are the paddies flooded all the time?"

"Oh, no. They are flooded before the rice is planted. You know we do not plant seed in the paddies? We plant baby rice plants which are grown in special places. The little plants are pushed into the mud after the paddy is flooded. Then the water is left for a while. But if we left it all the time, the plants would rot. So after a while we let the water out and only let in enough to keep the rice growing."

They were over the terraces now. Beyond them, Rick

saw brown houses that looked like beehives. It was an Igorot village.

"We'll reach Bontoc soon," Angel said.

"No truck and no sedan," Scotty added unhappily. "They couldn't have reached Bontoc, could they?"

"The truck could have, easily, if Nangolat drove during the night."

"Then we'll have to keep hunting past Bontoc right into Banaue."

Angel tapped Rick on the shoulder and pointed ahead. "There is Bontoc."

Nestled in the mountains on the bank of a river was the town of Bontoc, a small cluster of wooden and grass houses. Rick saw that the dirt road had changed to a black top.

"I'm going to look for a place to land."

Scotty nodded. "Good idea."

Rick waited until the town was directly below, then he sized up the terrain and began to lose altitude in a tight spiral. It was in situations like this that the Sky Wagon's flaps came in handy. He pulled the control down and the movable sections on the trailing edges of the wings moved down in response. He began to lose speed.

When he was five hundred feet over the town he flew parallel with the road, searching for wires and other hazards. There were wires, but they entered the town from the south, then branched west, toward Banaue.

To the north there were no wires, nor any other hazards he could see. And the road looked level. He picked a stretch at the edge of the little town where the houses were far apart. They were primitive little dwellings made of straw tied together in bundles. He hoped his prop wash wouldn't blow them apart.

"Hang on," he said. "Here we go."

The movement of rice stalks in a paddy near the road gave him wind direction. He should land from the north. He circled, got into position, and started in. Scotty leaned forward, eyes peeled for obstructions.

There was excitement in the town below. People in Western clothes and in scant breechcloths or tight skirts of Igorots were running into the open to see what was making the racket. Rick hurried the landing a little, afraid the people would clutter up the strip of road he had chosen. He put the Sky Wagon down with no sign of a bump and braked to a stop. Then, because children were getting near, outstripping their elders in haste to see the plane, Rick cut the engine.

Two Igorot boys, perhaps fourteen years old, were the first to reach the plane as the three climbed out. The Igorots had the chopped-off bowl haircut, and they wore breechcloths and nothing else. They stared at the plane, wide-eyed, then one said something to his friend in guttural Igorot.

Angel Manotok grinned. Rick asked, "Did you understand?"

"Yes. I speak Igorot."

Scotty said, "They probably were talking about the great sky bird. That right, Angel?"

Angel's grin broadened. "Not exactly. The English equivalent would be slang. What he said corresponded to 'Hey, bud, get a load of the real snazzy four-place job. And dig that retractable landing gear!' "

The boy who had spoken looked at Angel with suspicion. "You no Igorot," he accused.

Angel chuckled. "You no Englishman, but you speak English."

The boy laughed. "Okay, Mac. My name Pilipil. I learn plenty plane stuff at Clark. Dig holes there for pay. See many plane."

Rick and Scotty got over their amazement. It was obvious that the boys were more than fourteen years old. Their short stature and unlined faces were deceptive.

"How old are you, Pilipil?" Rick asked.

"Eighteen."

Rick wanted to know more about the boy who had worked as a laborer at the American Air Force Base at Clark Field, but there was no time because the rest of the crowd had arrived. The boys found themselves surrounded by Filipinos and Igorots, all chattering with obvious excitement and interest.

A Filipino who was obviously someone of importance pushed his way through the crowd. He was dressed in

a business suit, complete with starched shirt and tie, an odd rig for such a primitive village as Bontoc, Rick thought. The man was smoking a cigar with one hand and carrying a cane with the other. He hung the cane over the wrist on the cigar hand and held out the other.

"I am the district road commission. Leocadio de los Santos, at your service. Mr. Lazada informed me by letter that I was to place my entire resources at your disposal. You are Mr. Brant, Mr. Scott, and Dr. Briotti?"

"Dr. Briotti is not with us," Rick replied. "This is Mr. Manotok."

"Ah. Delighted. Please come to my office so we may talk quietly."

Rick looked doubtful. "We shouldn't leave the plane."

"Do not fear. It will be perfectly safe."

Santos switched to the native language, speaking briefly and with authority. The crowd obediently fell back a few paces, leaving a cleared area around the plane. The road commissioner had the situation under control, all right.

Nevertheless, Angel Manotok said, "I will wait here."

Rick nodded. That was best. He and Scotty followed Santos to the office, a few hundred feet down the street. The office was on the second floor of a frame building. The first floor was a work area filled with tools, including a bulldozer and a road scraper.

Before discussing business, Santos insisted on refreshment. He clapped his hands and a dungaree-clad

Filipino workman appeared. Santos spoke. In a few moments the workman reappeared. Both boys were surprised when he offered them their favorite American beverage. It seemed strange to be sipping coke in a place inhabited by primitive people clad in breechcloths, some of them armed with short spears.

Rick got down to business. "Can you find out if a truck and a green sedan have passed through Bontoc?"

"What kind of truck, please?"

Rick described it. "We don't have the make of the sedan. It may have had five men in it." He couldn't believe that the sedan had reached Bontoc, however.

Santos picked up his phone, reached down, and whirled a crank. The phone rang. He spoke Ilokano into it, then received a reply from the other end. He spoke again, then hung up. "That was the gateman at the edge of town. No truck and no sedan passed through here today."

CHAPTER IX

Ifugao Country

THERE was only one difficulty, but it was a major one. Rick didn't know whether or not the district road commissioner could be believed. Santos was Lazada's man.

The boys finished their cokes before Rick decided on a course of action. If Santos was lying, they would find out soon enough. So, for the present, they would assume that he was telling the truth, and that he could be trusted.

"Is the province peaceful up this way?" Rick asked.

"Oh, yes." Santos replied. "It is usually very peaceful. Sometimes on the road south there is a holdup, but the Igorots in Bontoc and the Ifugaos at Banaue cause no trouble."

"Glad to hear it," Scotty said. "When we start digging, some of the Ifugaos may get upset. I'm glad to hear that they're not often riled up."

"What are your plans?" Santos asked.

Rick shrugged. "It is hard to know where to begin.

Before we plan our campaign to locate the place where we dig, we must survey the terraces. Is there any sort of field where I could land at Banaue?"

"No," Santos replied with great positiveness. "Once you see the terraces you will see for yourself that there is nó place."

Rick stood up and Scotty followed suit. "I think perhaps we had better fly over to Banaue and see the terraces. Then we will have a better understanding of our problems. Thank you for your hospitality, Mr. De los Santos."

"It is nothing. But tell me. Isn't there another in your party? Another American?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Oh, the Assistant Secretary of the Interior phoned personally. He described all of you, and said to do everything possible to make your visit interesting and successful."

"That was very good of him," Rick said. "We will be back again, perhaps tomorrow. Will you be here?"

"I believe so. If I am not, it will be because I am inspecting a road section. Never am I gone long."

Santos lingered to give instructions in the native language to one of his men, and Rick took advantage of the few seconds to whisper to Scotty:

"I'll stall him. Get back to the plane. Have Angel make a deal with those Igorot boys to keep an eye on the road. I want another spy in Bontoc besides someone we know is Lazada's man. You know what's needed."

Scotty did. He hurried off to do what was necessary. Rick waited for Santos, then asked the commissioner to point out the road to Banaue. "I plan to follow the road in my plane. Do you think that is all right?"

Santos did. "You may lose the road in the clouds as you cross the top of the mountain range that divides the Igorot tribe from the Ifugaos, but you should then be able to see Banaue. Will you come back here after you have seen the terraces?"

"Not today. We probably will be back tomorrow in a jeep. The plane is handy, but we can't land at Banaue, you say."

"You will see. And I will see you tomorrow. Then you can tell me how the terraces look from the air."

"Better still," Rick promised. "Next time I have the plane here, I'll take you to see for yourself."

Scotty winked as Santos and Rick approached the plane, and Rick knew that Scotty and Angel had been able to make a deal with Pilipil, the Igorot boy, and his friend. The party shook hands with Santos, then climbed into the plane. The crowd of natives moved away from the road as Rick started the engine, then turned the plane and taxied down the road to the take-off point he had selected. He was a little nervous, for fear a child might dart into the road while he was picking up flying speed, but the crowd was well-disciplined and held steady as the Sky Wagon roared past and climbed.

"We now have Pilipil and his pal working for us," Scotty said when they were air-borne.

"They're smart boys," Angel added. "They'll be able to report on every car and every person passing through Bontoc from now until we get back."

Rick nodded. "Good. But I'm still worried. We've done everything we could think of, but there's no pay-off. We still haven't found Tony. We were sure whoever kidnaped him would head for the Ifugao country, but there were no sedans on the road today. How do we know Tony isn't hidden somewhere near Baguio? How do we know he's still alive?"

Scotty put a hand on his shoulder. "Why wouldn't he be alive? Who would gain anything by his death? We have to remember that the gimmick in this whole business is a golden skull. Nast wants it, Nangolat wants it, Lazada wants it, and we want it. No one has it."

Rick gained altitude steadily, keeping an eye on the twisting road below. "All right. I'll go along with your reasoning. Whoever wants the golden skull has to go to Banaue to find it. It can't be found—unless by a lucky accident—without the earth scanner. And who has the scanner?"

"Nangolat."

"Can he use it?"

"No."

Rick shrugged. "Tony can use the scanner, though. We suspect that Nast has Tony. The question is what is the relationship between Nangolat and Nast?"

Below the Sky Wagon the high green mountains marched in a series of ridges from horizon to horizon.

This was the divide between Igorot and Ifugao country. Rick let the conversation lag as he searched below and ahead for a landmark. There was a little cloud cover around him, as Santos had predicted.

Then the cloud was past and the three looked down into the great valley of Banaue.

Rick and Scotty gasped. It was incredible! As far as they could see, the mountains on either side of the valley were sculptured into irregular green steps, or terraces. The smallest terrace was perhaps only a few feet square, while the larger ones were the size of a football field. They rose in an irregular triangle right to the base of the clouds. There was no particular pattern. The Ifugao farmers had simply used every possible inch of space to make terraces for the growing of rice. In some places the step from one terrace to the next was only a foot or two. In other places the step up to the terrace above was forty feet.

The retaining walls of the terraces were native stone, irregular pieces laid together by expert Ifugao masons without benefit of mortar or concrete. The same method had been used to make the great wall of China.

Rick found his voice. "I've seen pictures, but they didn't tell even part of the story. This is fantastic!"

"It's the most wonderful job of engineering I've ever seen," Scotty agreed. "And when you think that the engineers are primitive people, with only hand tools, that makes it even more wonderful."

Angel Manotok had seen the terraces before, he said,

but added, "I'm glad to see them from the air. You can understand now why Santos said there was no place to land."

Rick certainly could understand. The only level places in the entire valley were the flat surfaces of the terraces, and no terrace was large enough to land on. In fact, most terraces were too small even for a carabao, the native water buffalo, to drag a plow across them. The Ifugao rice planters had to farm their terraces by hand.

There was no use looking for a landing place in the immediate vicinity of Banaue.

"We'd better take a swing down the valley, just to get a good look, then head back for Baguio," Rick said.

"Good idea," Scotty agreed. "We need to lay some plans and then get busy. Can you fly fairly low?"

"Yes. There's room enough in the valley to make turns, so we won't get trapped. Let's go down and look."

The town of Banaue was easy to find. A double row of stores was situated on a single unpaved street atop a slight plateau in the valley bottom. The Sky Wagon sped over it, bringing the storekeepers and their few customers running out to look.

"The Ifugaos live in villages around the valley," Angel said. He pointed to one or two of them, clinging to the mountainside between terraces. The huts were of straw bundles, discolored by smoke and dust. "The stores have kerosene, thread, matches, tobacco, salt, oil, perhaps a little cloth. The Ifugaos do not need much—or, if they need it, they do not know that they do."

Rick thought that one over as he climbed out of the valley and set a compass course south to Baguio. The course would intersect the Bontoc Road, which he would then follow into town.

"What's our next step?" he asked.

"We've got to find Tony, of course. I have a hunch that we weren't thorough enough in looking over the Bontoc Road. Nangolat *had* to be on it. Where else could he go? Or where else *would* he go?"

"That lumber could have been camouflage," Angel offered.

Rick's first reaction was to ask what lumber, then he remembered that an Army truck like theirs, but loaded with lumber, had been on the Bontoc Road.

"Of course! Who would suspect a load of lumber, especially since this is lumber country?"

Scotty nodded. "It's possible. Tomorrow we'll go back to Bontoc, and if Nangolat was driving that lumber truck, Pilipil and company will know it. Tonight we'll cover Baguio again to make sure our enemies aren't still around. Perhaps we can find Chahda."

"If we haven't found Dr. Briotti by tomorrow night," Angel said, "we should go to the police."

"There's someone else we'll visit first," Rick said grimly. "And that's Mr. Irineo Lazada!"

CHAPTER X

Ambush

THE hotel had received no word of Tony Briotti. Rick and Scotty hadn't really expected any word. They were certain that he had been kidnaped by Nast. Even the reason for the kidnaping was no longer important. What was important was to rescue Tony.

Angel Manotok left before the boys were ready for dinner. He hoped to pick up some information at various places he knew around town. Perhaps gossip which might be useful. Perhaps someone had seen something unusual which could have a bearing on the young archaeologist's disappearance. Angel promised to report back later. He would spend the night in Tony's room.

Rick and Scotty decided to have dinner, and then talk with some of the local Americans about the best place to buy a jeep. If possible, they wanted to pick one up after dinner, get it ready to travel, and have it standing by the next morning early.

They did not talk much at dinner. They were more

worried about Tony than either of them would admit, and Rick was feeling a little ill at ease because they hadn't notified the police. He had talked it over with Angel, but the Filipino guide had said. "We'll have to notify them sooner or later, but it will do no good."

"Perhaps we should notify the American ambassador at Manila," Rick said aloud.

"We should have notified him long before this," Scotty agreed. "But we always try to do everything ourselves. I guess we'll never learn."

Angel Manotok appeared in the dining room, eyes searching for the boys. Rick saw him and waved. Angel came over and slid into a seat. Apparently he had seen a doctor, because the bandage around his head was a new one.

"Friend of yours coming this way," he said. "Probably will have dinner here. Lazada."

Scotty's lips tightened. "I'll be glad to see him," he assured Angel. "I want to ask him about his pal Nast."

Rick's eyes opened wide. "No need," he said. "Look at the door."

There, just entering were Lazada and Nast, arm in arm!

The boys waited until they were seated, then walked over to join them.

"Good evening," Rick said. "I hope you gentlemen are well."

Lazada and Nast smiled. The Assistant Secretary

nodded. "Both quite well, thank you. And how are you?"

"Oh, I'm fine," Rick said. "But my friend is giving me a little trouble." He pulled a chair out from Lazada's table and sat down. Scotty followed suit. Rick was close to Lazada, while Scotty's chair was nearer to Nast.

"Your friend is giving you trouble?" Lazada asked. "Which friend?"

"This one," Rick said, motioning to Scotty. "He wants to kill Mr. Nast. I don't think we should kill Mr. Nast, do you?"

Lazada smiled. "Ask him."

Rick turned to Nast. "Do you have an opinion, Mr. Nast?"

Nast was a little pale, but his voice was steady enough. "I certainly do. I agree with you, Mr. Brant."

Rick grinned mirthlessly. "You do? I'm glad. Instead of killing you, I suggested to Scotty that we cripple you. Perhaps a few compound fractures of the arms and legs."

Rick could see that neither Lazada nor Nast were as composed as they seemed. The calm, unearthly discussion was too bizarre. Threats were something they understood, but not threats like this.

Scotty spoke for the first time. He addressed Nast. "Because you're a fellow American I thought the decent thing to do would be just to kill you outright."

Nast shuddered visibly. "You're both joking, of course. But it isn't a very funny joke, I assure you."

Rick smiled. "No, it isn't very funny. But neither is Dr. Briotti's disappearance. You'd better tell us where he is."

"What makes you think Mr. Nast knows?" Lazada asked.

Rick considered. They had no proof. No one had seen Nast in the sedan that had taken Tony from the airport. The boys saw movement at the entrance to the dining room and realized that two Filipinos were watching them like hawks, and that the hands in their pockets certainly held pistols.

Rick shifted tactics. "Do you have much faith in your bodyguards?"

Lazada raised his eyebrows. "Faith? Of course. They are loyal to me. If anyone tries to get close to me without my permission, they step in and remove that person. Or, if anyone should try violence . . ."

Rick smiled. "How good do you think they would be against a sniper with a rifle five hundred yards away?"

"Obviously, they would be ineffective."

"Just the point I wanted to make," Rick agreed. "You realize, of course, that there is no protection against assassination, except to take refuge in a fortress of some kind and stay there. That's impossible for a public figure like yourself."

"True. Your point, then, is what?"

"That Dr. Briotti has friends with rifles. It would distress us to find that he had been harmed."

"It would distress me," Lazada assured them. "I was very much impressed by Dr. Briotti's knowledge and enthusiasm. I assume that you think I have some knowledge about his disappearance. I do not."

"Me either," Nast added hastily.

Lazada's round face glistened with perspiration. "I will control my anger, Mr. Brant. I take your age into account. Allow me to remind you, however, that I am an official of the Philippine Government and that you are an alien. You are here on sufferance, and you have only such rights as you can persuade us to give you. Oh, I know there are agreements. But let us be realistic. Do not force me to lose my temper and do something for which I would be sorry."

"All right." Rick rose. "I'm not as enthusiastic about this expedition as I used to be, but we're going through with it, anyway, starting tomorrow. The sooner we finish, the better for everybody." He looked at Nast. "Except you. I can only promise you that your pal Lazada will never be able to give you the golden skull to smuggle into China."

The boys walked back to their own table and left Nast and Lazada staring after them. That would give them something to chew over, Rick thought.

"I'm not sure that we were smart," Scotty said when they were seated once more. "I'm sure Nast had something to do with Tony's disappearance, but I can't tell you why I'm sure. Was it wise to throw it up to them?"

Rick shrugged. "Maybe not. But it's done now."

The boys slept with locked windows and doors, but they slept soundly. Down the hall, Angel also regained strength and optimism while he slept, so that the three awoke the next morning with a determination to make some real progress. They had followed their plans and obtained a jeep the night before. But they would need blankets and warmer clothing, unless their supplies could be recovered.

Over breakfast, Scotty estimated their chances. "Suppose we find out that the truck is somewhere in the Ifugao country. Would that guarantee our getting it back? No, it would not. So, we'd better write off the stuff in the truck as lost."

Fortunately, stores open early in Baguio, and the boys were able to buy the things they needed. Scotty also bought an extra five-gallon gasoline can for the jeep. Then Angel and Scotty loaded their few belongings into the vehicle, shook Rick's hand, and headed for Bontoc.

They had agreed that it might be convenient to have the Sky Wagon at Bontoc, too, so Rick would fly up later, planning to arrive at about the same time. Now, he sat down in the hotel lobby and penned a note to the American ambassador, describing the events of yesterday and telling of their future plans. He gave the note to the desk clerk, with instructions that it was not to be sent for three days.

Rick figured that at the end of that time he would

either reclaim the note, or that all of them would be in need of help, and the American ambassador would get the letter and use it as a reason for sending a strong note to the Philippine Government, or maybe call out the Marines, the Navy, and the Air Force. Rick was a little vague on just what would happen.

The note written, he tried to read for a while. Scotty and Angel were not well started, and it would be pointless for him to go on to Bontoc alone. He wondered where Chahda was, and what he was doing. The Hindu boy had his own way of operating, and it was one Rick and Scotty could not hope to copy. Chahda had the gift of mimicry. He could fade into a new background as though he belonged to it.

Rick hoped that Chahda, somehow, was keeping a protective eye on Tony.

He couldn't read. He tried napping, but that was no good, either. At last, unable to remain idle a moment longer, he took a taxi to the airport, topped off the Sky Wagon's tanks with gas, checked the plane thoroughly, got a weather report and took off.

He climbed to fifteen thousand feet and scanned the terrain for landmarks. He spotted Mount Panay to the west, verifying its name on the map. Then he picked up the Bontoc Road and searched for the highest point, where it emerged from the valleys and swung across a peak over seven thousand feet above sea level.

If he had estimated Scotty's travel time correctly, the

jeep should just now be emerging into the brilliant sunlight of the peaks. He wished for binoculars, but they had failed to bring any, one of those oversights that happen on any expedition.

There was a little traffic on the road. A car of some kind was at the peak, probably stopped to allow the occupants to see the magnificent view. Then he saw that the car was being driven off the road into a grove of trees just beyond the peak. That was odd.

He identified the jeep. In a moment or two it would be at the peak. He would go down and wave. Then he would go back to the airport, have lunch, and fly on to Bontoc. That way, he would get there only slightly ahead of Scotty and Angel.

He lost altitude. Below, men were getting out of the car which had driven into the scant cover of a scrub-pine grove. Rick watched as they walked to the peak. Sunlight reflected from metal. Probably lunch boxes, he thought. The men were going to have their picnic lunch while looking over the wonderful mountains of northern Luzon. Good idea. Probably that was why they had parked the car off the road.

Then he saw that they were not stopping at the peak, but were taking positions along the road a short distance beyond it. Again, sunlight glinted from metal as one of them sat down in a copse just off the road.

Sweat suddenly poured on Rick's forehead. He wasn't watching simple picnickers! He was watching an am-

bush being set up—and it could only be for one vehicle, because there was only one in sight along the miles of twisting highway.

Scotty and Angel!

Rick spun the Sky Wagon up on a wing and let it slide. He held the slide for long moments while the altimeter ticked off the lost altitude. Not until it registered eight thousand feet did he level off, only a thousand feet above the mountaintops. For a moment he couldn't see Scotty and Angel, then he saw them climbing toward the peak at a good speed. In about twenty seconds they would reach it.

He gauged the amount of clearance he had. It wasn't much. Then he put the stick forward and dove for the road. He leveled off so low that his prop wash kicked up dust. The jeep seemed to rush at him and he had a glimpse of Scotty's surprised face, then he was roaring up in a climb that flattened him against the seat. He leveled off and looked for the jeep. It was still moving ahead.

Rick groaned. Scotty thought he was just playing! He should have written a note and dropped it, but now there was no time. The jeep would be in the ambush before he could let his friends know why he had buzzed them.

He was helpless. There wasn't anything in the Sky Wagon that he could throw at the enemy. But he could

at least try to make them keep their heads down. He roared in for the attack, aiming at the places where the attackers waited.

The ambushers had the advantage. All they had to do was sit still. Rick could not hurt them without cracking up the plane and actually landing on them. Still, it was terrifying to have the plane roar past scarcely two feet above one's head, and Rick knew the attackers would be worried about the possibility of an accident.

One man had weak nerves. On Rick's second pass he stood up and ran, heading for the comforting shelter of the trees. Scotty saw him. The jeep braked to a halt.

Instantly the ambushers opened fire. Scotty and Angel jumped from the exposed jeep and took to the ditch. Rick dove at the riflemen again and saw them shoot at him.

He gained a little altitude and circled, estimating the situation. There were four attackers, counting the one who had run for the car. That left three effective ones. Scotty and Angel were unarmed, a grave mistake. They should have purchased weapons. However, since he had been able to warn them, the attack had failed. They were in good cover, and as long as he was overhead, ready to dive on the attackers if they should try for a better position, the two were all right.

Rick thought he saw a way out. At least there was no harm in trying. He took the pad of paper he kept in the

door pocket and printed a message to the attackers.

YOU HAVE LOST. NO MATTER WHICH WAY YOU GO, I CAN FOLLOW. I CAN HAVE THE POLICE TRAP YOU AT BONTOC OR BAGUIO. I CAN CARRY POLICE TO BONTOC FASTER THAN YOU CAN DRIVE THERE. BUT IF YOU LEAVE YOUR RIFLES IN THE ROAD, GO TO YOUR CAR, AND HEAD FOR BAGUIO, I WILL DO NOTHING.

He searched for a weight and found his emergency fishing kit, a war surplus item which he carried in case he might someday find himself at a good fishing spot without tackle. From the kit he extracted a heavy sinker. A piece of fishing line completed the rig. He lashed the sinker to the folded paper. Now to toss it out so it would land among the attackers. He swung low over the road, gauging his distance. When he saw the peak rushing at him he released the weighted paper, climbed swiftly, and saw one of the attackers run to get it.

Apparently it made sense to the three men. They talked among themselves for a moment, then carried their rifles to the middle of the road and went to the car. Scotty and Angel realized that something was going on, but prudently remained under cover. Not until the ambushers' car roared past on the way to Baguio did they emerge and wave at Rick. He waggled his wings, then turned and made a beeline for the city. He wanted guns and ammunition, and there was no time like the present to buy them!

CHAPTER XI

Warriors Three

RICK got guns, but it took time. There were no sporting goods stores in Baguio. In fact, there were no stores that carried rifles. A few carried pistols, mostly Italian and English makes. But Rick knew that a pistol is better for morale than for actual use. Few people can hit anything with a pistol, and fewer still can hit a moving target.

He supposed that Scotty and Angel had picked up the rifles of the ambushers, but since he didn't know the calibers, he couldn't get ammunition for them. What he finally procured were a shotgun, 12-gauge with an ample supply of shells, and a United States Army carbine, with about ten clips. These were private purchases from a store owner who was willing to sell his personal arsenal.

It was late when Rick got started for Bontoc. He watched for Scotty and Angel on the road but failed to

catch up with them. They had reached Bontoc before him, as he found when he circled to land. They cleared the road and stood by while he brought the Sky Wagon down.

Angel had already hired two Igorots to guard the plane. They were tough-looking customers who wore hard-rock miner's helmets, a sign that they had mined gold in Baguio.

The Sky Wagon was pulled off the road into a field and the Igorots sat down next to it, short spears handy to their reach. The plane would be all right. Rick got into the jeep with Scotty and Angel, and the first thing he saw was their collection of armaments. They had four rifles, two of them old Army Springfield rifles, and two carbines.

"We are now well armed," he said. "Where's the enemy?"

"After that ambush," Scotty replied, starting the motor, "I'm no longer sure. We certainly didn't expect that."

"I think we brought it on ourselves," Rick said. "Last night we gave Lazada and Nast a hard time. I'll bet Lazada sent out that expedition just for laughs." A thought struck him. "By the way, where are the two Igorot boys you hired yesterday? How come they aren't guarding the plane?"

"We thought we'd take them with us, as extra hands," Scotty explained. "They live at the southern edge of

town. We're going there now. We've already talked with Pilipil. He's getting a third boy for us to hire."

"Hey, take it easy," Rick complained. "Explain as you go. What did Pilipil say, and why the third boy?"

"Our truck has gone over the mountain into Ifugao country. It was the lumber truck, as we might have known. Nangolat was driving, and Tony and a third man were with them. That was yesterday. We didn't tell Pilipil and his friend to follow the truck, so they didn't. But a third Igorot boy did follow, and he returned to Bontoc this morning. He's with Pilipil now. We'll go pick them up and head for Banaue. And we'll get Tony."

Rick was still a little confused, but he guessed Scotty knew what he was talking about. "Who is the Igorot who trailed our truck?"

"Don't know. He was sleeping at Pilipil's when we got here."

Ahead, Pilipil was standing in front of a board shack, waving. It was evidently his home. The jeep pulled up and Rick, Scotty, and Angel got out. Pilipil shook hands all around. "You come in," he said. "We talk. Make plan."

He led the way into the shack. Within, two other young Igorots were seated cross-legged on the floor. One of them was Pilipil's friend, Balaban, who had been with him on the day they first landed.

The third Igorot—as might have been expected—was Chahda.

Scotty pointed to the Hindu boy, who was watching

them with an impassive stare, as though he had never seen them before.

"Pilipil, how do you know this boy good? Can be trusted?"

Pilipil shrugged and showed betel-stained teeth in a smile. "Not know. Maybe no good. But say he know you."

Scotty looked stern. "You. What have you to say for yourself?"

"Plenty," Chahda said. "Am plenty tired of pulling Spindrift chestnuts out of fire. You know how cold it gets in these mountain? Last night I freeze. I almost attack whole Ifugao village barehanded, just to get blankets from supplies on truck. Tonight you take off clothes, put on breechcloth, and stand out in cold. I stay in nice warm hotel, in Baguio. Worrold Alm-in-ack say this tropical country. Hah! Like North Pole is tropical."

Rick and Scotty grinned sympathetically. "If you weren't so in love with being mysterious and adventurous," Rick pointed out, "you could sleep in comfortable beds in warm rooms. But no. You have to be Chahda the Vanishing Hindu. And a good thing, too, otherwise Scotty and I would be floundering most of the time, not knowing where to turn next. Is Tony okay?"

Chahda rose. He looked astonishingly like Pilipil and Balaban. From haircut to bare feet he was an Igorot. Only his brown eyes, proportionally bigger than those of the real Igorots, were different.

"Tony is okay. Or was last night. My pal Dog Meat is keeping eye on him. You see Nast?"

"In Baguio, last night." Scotty told Chahda of their visit with Nast and Lazada.

Chahda nodded. "Nast and Nangolat in cahoots. Nast picks up Tony at airport, takes him to hut near Trinidad Valley. I see all this. At hut is Nangolat, with truck of lumber. Nast turns Tony over to Nangolat, so I drop Nast and follow Tony. Me and Dog Meat, we have fine time. You fly overhead, too, but see nothing. Not even me. You getting blind, I think. Lose famous Brant eyesight."

"We saw the lumber truck," Rick admitted. "But where were you?"

"Little way behind in jeep."

Rick remembered that they had seen a couple of jeeps on the road but had paid no attention. He could see now what had probably happened. Nangolat, after stealing the earth scanner, had taken the truck to the hut at Trinidad Valley and camouflaged it with lumber. Tony had gone to the airport, but had not found Nangolat—he had found Nast. But why? Rick put the question aloud.

"Mix up in schedule," Chahda said. "Nast and Nangolat were to meet at airport and wait for all of you. Catch whole lot at once when you go to airport in the morning. But Nangolat has luck, and he gets earth scanner. He takes truck to Trinidad, so you won't find it and get scanner back. Nast comes to airport in morning, and

finds no Nangolat, but he finds Tony. So he takes Tony and goes to Trinidad Valley to hut which he knows about, and there is Nangolat."

"How do you know all this?" Scotty demanded.

Chahda grinned. "From Nast. He reports to Lazada by telephone. I listen. Easy. Who would think poor Igorot boy know anything?"

Rick shook his head in admiration. Leave it to Chahda. "Now what, Master Spy?"

Chahda motioned to Pilipil and Balaban. "We three mighty Igorot warriors. Tonight we lead you to Ifugao, and we get Tony and the truck and our other stuffs. Then we get to work and find this golden skull."

"You mean we just walk in and take Tony away from the Ifugaos?" Scotty demanded.

"Not that simple," Chahda said. "Ifugaos not wanting to give Tony up, I think. First he help them find sacred stuff lost for many generations, then they need new head to sacrifice to sacred stuff, so they use his. Neat, huh? I think we don't get Tony back without a fight."

CHAPTER XII

The Ifugao Village

THE terraced mountain wall fell away below to the valley floor. Halfway between Rick and the dark sheen of the river was a level area which Chahda said was the village. However, it was too dark to see very much.

"We'll break our necks if we try to climb around among these terraces," Scotty whispered.

Chahda admitted, "Good possibility. But what else is there? Later moon will be up a little. We not go down yet. Study lay of land."

They had left their jeeps on the roadway that passed above the village. So far as they knew, no one had seen them approach. Now, perhaps a hundred feet above the cluster of huts, they sat at the edge of a terrace and waited for the moon to rise.

Rick studied the landscape below. His feet dangled over thirty feet of vertical wall. He would have to make his way down that wall to the next terrace, and then down the next and the next until he emerged at the

village level. He would be very much like an ant climbing down the three stone steps at home, except that he wasn't as sure-footed as an ant on vertical surfaces.

Then, once the bottom was reached, they had to find Tony, free him, and take him up the terraces to the jeeps. Rick shook his head. They probably would have to fight every inch of the way, and there was no assurance that they would make it.

In the village below, someone was adding wood to a small open fire in the central area that served as a village common. Rick could make out several figures. Scotty moved closer to him. "We need a way to cover our retreat. Any ideas?"

"No good ones. We could station a couple of the gang to heave rocks down."

"That's probably as good as anything."

A shadowy figure approached, climbing down the terraces from above. Chahda whispered, "Dog Meat come. I go see what he finds out."

Below, the fire was burning more brightly, and Rick could see several persons bringing wood. Apparently there was to be a large bonfire. He groaned softly. That meant light to make their task harder.

Chahda consulted with his friend for a few moments, then rejoined Rick and Scotty. Angel, Pilipil, and Balaban were grouped at the rear of the terrace, waiting for instructions.

"Dog Meat know which hut Tony is in. Has two guards. Nangolat gone somewhere."

"Why are they building up the fire?" Rick asked.

"Not know. I think better we move. We climb down. Dog Meat will take us to Tony. We cut him loose and fight our way back."

Suddenly they stiffened as a rhythmic metallic clanging sound floated up to them.

Angel Manotok moved to their side. "Ifugao music," he whispered. "I've heard it before. The instruments are *tinaklings*, like pans, suspended from human jawbones. They're getting ready for some kind of ceremony down there."

"Then we'll wait," Scotty said. "If they get started on some kind of ceremony, we may have a chance to move in quietly."

"That makes sense," Rick agreed, and Chahda nodded.

They crouched on the edge of the terrace and watched as the fire below grew into a roaring blaze. Men and women could be seen clearly now. The musicians—if the clanging could be called music—were next to the fire. Then, the people fell back, and six men and six women took their places in two lines and began to dance. It was a stiff, formal sort of dance with little body movement. Hands and arms made gestures which Rick could not interpret, while the feet shuffled slowly in the dust.

Scotty touched his shoulder. "Let's go. Chahda, you, Rick, Dog Meat, and I will go. Angel, Pilipil, and Balaban will stay here to cover our retreat. Angel, you can

use a rifle. Have Pilipil and Balaban pry loose some big rocks. Use your own judgment. We don't want a war, but we don't want to lose our heads, either."

"How about our truck?" Rick asked.

Chahda replied. "It is not here. Nangolat took it. We get Tony, then we take the road Nangolat took. Dog Meat knows."

The fire was bright enough so Rick could see Dog Meat for the first time. The little Igorot was an older edition of Pilipil. He wore only a breechcloth and the little pillbox hat in which he kept his matches and tobacco. His face was wrinkled and gnomelike.

"Lead on," Rick said.

Dog Meat went to the edge of the terrace and slipped over. He climbed down with incredible swiftness. Then Chahda followed. Rick made sure his carbine was slung tightly across his back, then followed. His feet groped for toe holds in the rough stone wall of the terrace and found them without too much difficulty, but his descent was slower than Dog Meat or Chahda's. He was painfully conscious that he was an excellent target. Below, chanting voices joined the rhythmic clanging. The sound of their descent would not be heard.

Rick reached the bottom of the terrace and found Chahda and Dog Meat waiting. There were two more terraces to descend before the village level was reached. In a moment Scotty joined them. Dog Meat led the way once more. The party made its way down the face of

the terrace and emerged on a level only thirty feet above the village floor.

Rick was astonished that the villagers had not seen them. He felt very much exposed to view, even though he realized that the shadows were deep and that the villagers were not watching the terraces.

Dog Meat led the way to the extreme end of the next terrace, choosing a place where the huts would be between the climbers and the fire. Then he vanished over the edge of the terrace and Chahda followed. Rick picked his way carefully. There were gaps between the stones, but sometimes he had to feel with his feet until he found an opening big enough to accommodate the toe of his shoe. Dog Meat and Chahda had the advantage, because bare feet could find holds much more swiftly.

He reached ground level behind a straw hut. Dog Meat and Chahda were waiting. Chahda had unslung his rifle, and Dog Meat was holding a razor-edged bolo. Then Scotty was down, too, and they made a close file behind Dog Meat as he showed them the way to the hut where Tony was being held.

The music and voices were loud, now, and the fire made yellow patterns where they crossed open spaces. Then Dog Meat came to a halt behind a straw hut and gestured that this was the one.

Chahda took the bolo from him and made a slit in the straw of the hut. Then he peered through the opening

he had made. Rick and Scotty pushed close and took turns looking.

Tony was tied to a post in the center of the hut. The hut door opened onto the village common, and the only light was that of the fire. Blocking the light were two figures, Ifugao guards, clad only in breechcloths. Both held spears. Unlike the Igorot spears, the Ifugao weapons were tall with flared points.

Chahda sliced through the straw of the hut with the bolo, parted it, and stepped through. Rick was close on his heels, rifle unslung and ready for use. He felt Scotty crowding him.

The Hindu boy ran to Tony, knelt, and cut his bonds. Rick lifted his rifle and reached the front of the hut in three long strides. The barrel of his weapon descended on the head of the nearest Ifugao. Rick caught the man as he fell.

The second Ifugao turned, mouth open to yell, and stepped right into a vicious butt stroke from Scotty's rifle. Chahda was already ushering Tony through the opening at the rear of the hut. The boys pushed through and followed at a trot as Dog Meat guided them back the way they had come. The music was still loud. No one had seen the guards go down.

The party reached the first terrace and stopped while Tony massaged his hands. The rope had cut off the circulation. Finally he motioned that he was ready. He could climb, but slowly. At a whispered word from

Chahda, Rick and Scotty went up the terrace wall and took stations with ready rifles, in case they should be spotted while Tony was helpless on the wall.

Tony reached the top of the first terrace and whispered that he could move faster now. Chahda and Dog Meat took him to the easiest place to climb the second wall, while Rick and Scotty waited as a rear guard.

Tony was halfway up the second terrace when pandemonium broke loose in the village below. The boys saw the dance break up, saw men rush into the hut where Tony had been held prisoner and drag out the guards, one of whom had regained consciousness. The men of the village scattered into various huts and came out with spears and bolos.

Rick looked up in time to see Tony's legs disappear over the top of the terrace wall. He tugged Scotty's arm. "Let's go."

They swarmed up the wall as fast as their groping hands and feet would allow, but not before a spear clanged off the stones between them. They had been spotted!

Chahda leaned over and grabbed Rick's hand. Rick went up in a hurry, then both of them pulled Scotty up. Ifugaos were already on the terrace below!

Rick realized that the Ifugaos had the advantage. They were used to the terraces. He also realized that they could be where he now stood before Tony could get up to where Angel and the Igorots waited.

He and Scotty unslung their rifles. Chahda joined them, bolo in hand. Dog Meat would help Tony up. The boys spread out, working by hand signals. They were a short distance back from the terrace edge, but close enough to swing at any heads that appeared.

The first Ifugao pursuer came up the wall near Chahda. The Hindu boy swung with the flat of his bolo and there was a *thunk* as he connected. Then Rick saw a face appear and poked at it with the muzzle of his rifle. The face vanished and there was a scream as the Ifugao fell.

Rick winced. It was a long fall, but at least there was soft ground of the rice paddy at the bottom.

Another face appeared and Rick swung his rifle barrel, felt it connect, then answered Angel's yell. "Come on!"

Scotty triggered off half a dozen shots, then the three boys ran for the wall and started up. From above, Angel and Tony yelled encouragement. Angel's rifle blazed away. Pilipil, Tony, and Balaban threw rocks.

A spear, badly thrown, came sideways through the air and caught Rick across the legs. He almost lost his footing, but recovered and went up another step. He didn't dare look down. He knew the Ifugaos were on the terrace below, but to look down was to lose time. He went up another few feet, then got stuck unable to find a handhold.

A hand grabbed him by the ankle! He yelled and kicked. Angel appeared right over his head and dropped a rock. The rock brushed Rick and found its target. There was a wild cry and the grip on his ankle was gone. He moved laterally along the wall until he could move upward again. Angel and Pilipil caught his arms and pulled him to the top. Chahda arrived at almost the same moment, then Scotty appeared.

Rick unslung his rifle. "Let's go! Make a run for it."

Scotty called, "Angel! Chahda! Go get the jeeps started."

They had Chahda's jeep as well as their own. Rick caught Tony's arm. "Are you all right?"

"Yes. Fine. Where do we go?"

"Follow Chahda. Scotty and I will bring up the rear."

Ifugaos poured over the terrace edge and were met by Pilipil and Balaban. Scotty and Rick joined in, rifles flailing, and in a moment the terrace was clear again. The temporary victors took to their heels before the next wave of Ifugaos could arrive.

Ahead, they heard the jeeps' motors. They would make it all right.

A spear arched overhead and stuck quivering in the road. Rick snatched it out of the ground as he passed. Then there was a gasp from Pilipil as a spear caught him in the thigh. Instantly Scotty knelt, rifle blazing. Rick and Balaban helped Pilipil while Dog Meat yanked

the spear free. They rushed the wounded Igorot to the waiting jeeps.

"Let's go," Chahda yelled. "What's the delay?"

"Lend a hand," Rick called, and willing hands helped lift Pilipil into Chahda's jeep. Rick tumbled in behind him.

"All aboard!" Scotty yelled. "Take off!" he fired a last shot at the oncoming Ifugaos, then jeep wheels spun in the dirt, headlights flashed on, and they were on their way.

Not until they had climbed to the safety of the mountain peaks overlooking Banaue did they pull to a stop. Pilipil's leg was their first concern. They examined the wound in the glare from the jeep's headlights. It was ugly, but not crippling, and it was already starting to clot. Rick bound it with a clean handkerchief. Then, their wounded taken care of, the boys took time to exchange notes with Tony.

"I walked right into it," Tony said. "Literally. I walked to the airport, expecting that I could ride back with Angel. I had a grave suspicion, of course, that he was Nangolat, but I'm afraid it didn't occur to me that there was any danger in charging him with it."

Rick shook his head. "Did you expect him to give up without a struggle?"

"I'm afraid I did. However, he wasn't there. There was no one on the field at all, except a couple of workmen on the far side. I went over to see if the plane was

all right, and a sedan arrived. Nast was in it. He didn't waste words. He just thrust a pistol at me and ordered me in."

"We have an idea of what happened then," Scotty said. "From Chahda. He was following Nast."

"I hoped he was," Tony said. "I was afraid that unless Chahda knew my whereabouts I probably would be completely cut off from help. Well, time enough later for the rest of the story. You know I came from Baguio in our own truck?"

"We know," Rick said. "Chahda again. Now Chahda is going to lead us to the truck, and we're going to get our equipment back."

"Do you know where the truck is?" Scotty asked Chahda.

"Dog Meat does. Nangolat drove it to a village on the north side of the valley. Nangolat is there now. Maybe we meet him on the road, maybe at the village. We make flying raid, okay? Swoop down, take truck, and leave."

"Sounds good to me," Scotty said. "We'll use one jeep to attack, with the other standing by as a flying reserve. Angel, take the reserve jeep with Pilipil and Balaban. No, I've a better idea. We have too many men. We need the extra jeep in case of a breakdown, not for the men it will carry. Pilipil and Balaban should stay here. The rest of us split up between the two jeeps. When we find the truck, I'll drive it, with Chahda as guard. That will

leave Rick and Tony in one jeep, and Angel and Dog Meat in the other. Sound all right?"

It sounded fine. Angel spoke up. "I'd rather be in the first jeep, in case we meet Nangolat."

Scotty shook his head. "Not tonight. Your turn will come later, Angel. The first thing is to get the truck back. Pilipil, will you be all right here until we get back?"

"I be fine. You go."

They loaded into the jeeps while Pilipil and Balaban moved into a clump of brush and prepared to wait.

"Don't bother about silence," Scotty said. "We'll just hit and run. If they hear us coming it won't matter, because they won't be sure what we're after."

"How about those Ifugao natives from the village?" Tony asked. "They're probably swarming over the road like flies."

"We not go near them," Chahda replied. "The truck is a different way. Come on, load rifles. We go."

Rick was driving the lead jeep, Chahda on the seat next to him. Tony and Dog Meat were in the rear seat. Scotty was with Angel in the other jeep. The road was reasonably good, although narrow and winding. Rick roared down into the valley as fast as prudence and Newton's laws of motion allowed. Had he gone any faster the jeep would have tipped over on some unexpected corner.

"Soon we there!" Chahda shouted.

Rick kept a sharp watch ahead. The yellow cones of light seemed lost in the vast darkness of Banaue. There were no other lights.

"Watch for fork in road, go left," Chahda relayed Dog Meat's instructions.

The fork appeared. Rick swung left—and almost bashed into the truck. It was parked with lights out, close to a village.

Both jeeps slid to a stop. Scotty and Chahda jumped out, rifles ready, and ran to the truck. "The keys!" Rick yelled. "Are they in it?"

"Don't need keys!" Scotty yelled back. "Turn around, quick!"

Angel was already turning his jeep. Rick followed suit, and his headlights swung in an arc across the Ifugao village and reflected from spear tips. The natives here had been alerted!

The truck roared into life. Rick pulled to one side and motioned Scotty by. Then, as the truck went past, Rick triggered off a half-dozen shots, aiming high. Tony did the same with the shotgun, sending loads of bird shot whistling through the red leaves of the dangla bushes.

A screaming madman leaped at them, spear extended. It was Nangolat, face distorted with hatred and fury. He thrust at Tony, but the archaeologist knocked the spear aside. Then, as Nangolat's thrust carried him close, Tony let loose a roundhouse that caught the Ifugao

squarely on the jaw, whirled him sideways, and dropped him like a log in the dust of the road. Then Rick let out the clutch and the jeep leaped ahead. A spear went through the windshield and showered glass on him, but he only squinted his eyes against the flying splinters and fed the jeep more gas.

Ahead were the red taillights of the truck and the other jeep. The plan had worked, all right. He didn't know whether or not their supplies were in the truck, but they would soon find out.

"I'll say one thing about being a Spindrift scientist," Tony said from beside him. "It is never dull. Do you wild Indians go in for this sort of thing often?"

"Only when necessary," Rick said. "Of course it has been necessary pretty often. So we're in practice, you might say."

Tony chuckled. "I'm grateful. You know what Nangolat is working up to, I presume?"

Rick didn't, and said so.

"He planned to force me to locate the golden artifacts with the earth scanner. Then, the find was to be celebrated with the sacrifice of a head. That was the part I objected to most. You see, the head was to be mine!"

CHAPTER XIII

The Peaceful Profession

THE Spindrift campfire blazed high, and its warmth was welcome in the cold mountain night. Balaban and Dog Meat were out on patrol, although it was unlikely that any Ifugao had followed the invaders over the mountain.

Camp had been pitched in a grove of trees on the Igorot side of the divide. The boys and Tony had taken suitable clothing from their supplies and were now equipped with sturdy trail clothes and warm leather jackets. Chahda, similarly dressed in spare clothes, now resembled an Igorot only because of his haircut.

Tony sipped steaming coffee from a battered mug. He grinned at the faces around the fire: Rick, Scotty, Angel Manotok, Chahda, and Pilipil, whose wounded leg had been treated with supplies from the first-aid kit.

"Archaeologist at work," Tony commented. "Digs in musty old tombs all day, and now and then gets excited about a clay jug or something else he uncovers. The

archaeologist has nothing but old jugs or beetles or stuff like that to get excited about. It's a peaceful profession, boys. That's why I like it. Calm, quiet, orderly."

Pilipil didn't get the irony in Tony's voice, but the others laughed.

Scotty nodded agreement. "That's the popular idea of an archaeologist, all right! Sounds like a recruiting ad, doesn't it? Be peaceful and quiet. Live to a ripe old age. Be an archaeologist. Reminds me of the recruiting poster that hooked me once. Join the Marines, it said. See the world. Learn a trade. I joined. Saw the world while snaking on my belly through the South Pacific. Learned a trade, too. How to fire a rifle. Very few peacetime riflemen needed, however."

"We'll combine our trades," Tony said. "You might say we did, earlier tonight."

As Rick put more wood on the fire he said, "We're together, for the first time. Before, either Tony or Chahda was missing. Now what do we do?"

Tony considered. "I must admit I was not giving much thought to the purpose of the expedition when you came after me. I spent most of my time imagining how my skull would look on the knick-knack shelf in the hut."

"What knick-knack shelf?" Chahda asked.

"You wouldn't have noticed," Tony told them. "It was high in the rear of the hut, above the opening you made. A shelf full of skulls. I kept trying to flatter myself that

surely my head would be prettier than those. But I didn't really believe it."

"Do you really believe the Ifugaos would have taken your head?" Rick asked.

"You bet I do! You should have seen Nangolat. He shed civilization with his clothes. He got down to a breechcloth and he was all primitive. He's got a bad case of bats in the belfry, believe me. I'd say he was a true fanatic."

"Yes," Angel Manotok said positively. "You remember I tell you about those eyes of his? The doctor is right. Nangolat is crazy. He is a killer.'"

Rick remembered the crazed, distorted face of Nangolat rushing for the jeep with spear extended. "I vote Nangolat for nuts, too. Insane and dangerous."

"This being Mountain Province, Philippines, I don't think it would do much good to call the men in white coats to bring a strait jacket," Scotty observed. "So, what do we do? We can ignore him, avoid him, or shoot him. The first is hard, since he carries a sharp spear. The second may be possible. The third I reject as being unscientific and unkind, not to mention illegal."

"One more possibility," Chahda offered. "Catch him, tie him up, have Scotty talk him into stupor."

Rick chuckled. "You may have an idea there, Chahda. Seriously, Nangolat is guilty of kidnaping. That makes him a criminal. Surely it isn't wrong to catch an escaped criminal and turn him over to justice."

"Not wrong," Tony said, "but maybe just a little bit impractical."

Rick pressed the point. "Why? If we thought faster, we could have picked him up tonight. You knocked him colder than a penguin's pocketbook. We could have tossed him into the back of the jeep like a sack of bones."

"Yes, Rick. But chances like that don't come twice. Catching him now would mean making a definite attempt. It would mean an expedition. I doubt that he'd stay around to be caught."

"Guess you're right," Rick admitted. "Then, to get back to Scotty's question, what do we do now? Apparently Nangolat has his people up in arms against us. There's no law enforcement worthy of the name up here, so we can't call for help. So what next?"

Tony poured himself another mug of coffee from the steaming pot. "We continue after the cache of artifacts."

The boys stared. Chahda shook hands with the scientist. "Now I see why Rick and Scotty call you Tony. Number One regular guy. Why let little thing like whole nation of head-hunters scare you off?"

"Archaeology is certainly a peaceful profession," Rick said admiringly. "Scotty and I don't scare easily, but it didn't occur to me that we should proceed as though nothing had happened."

"You're getting the wrong impression," Tony said mildly. "Let's consider the situation. There's Nangolat, the principal troublemaker. What is his reason for behaving as he does?"

"Well," Scotty began, "he certainly was the one who tried to kill you on the boat."

"I think he was. He would have known all about the expedition from Okola. He would have known what ship we were on, and a phone call to the agent of the line would have told him our arrival time, from which he could easily have figured what time we would enter Manila Bay. He would also have known that I was the archaeologist for the expedition. After all, I signed the correspondence we had with Okola, and he was Okola's assistant."

"But why would he want to kill you?" Rick asked.

"For religious reasons. Nangolat is a religious fanatic. I saw that quite clearly during the time I was his captive. He does not want the artifacts dug up—or he didn't. Remember the legend? If they're dug up, drought and earthquakes will follow. By killing me aboard ship, the expedition would never take place. That must have been how he reasoned."

Rick was beginning to see light. "Angel, was Nangolat supposed to be a Christian?"

Angel shook his head. "No. He was a pagan. Once he went to church with me, but that was only to see how Christians worship. He worshiped the Ifugao gods which were in the museum at the university."

Rick commented, "I imagine his studies with Okola, and especially the work he did tracking down the legends of the golden skull, made him even more religious. I won't say superstitious."

"You're right," Tony said approvingly. "This is not superstition. Nangolat is as firmly convinced of the correctness of his religious beliefs as any Christian martyr. I'm sure he considered the object of our expedition as pure sacrilege."

"I'm with you up to a point," Scotty remarked. "But why didn't he kill the lot of us as soon as we landed? He could have gotten Rick and me the night we met you for dinner. We walked in a lot of dark places, and we weren't particularly on guard."

"He tried," Tony reminded them. "We surprised him in my room at the Manila Hotel. Probably he was examining my effects to see if I had maps or charts. Then he waited in the walled city and tried to pick you two off with rifle fire."

Chahda spoke up. "Not so easy to find chances to kill, even in city like Manila. With gang, yes. Alone, no."

"He's right," Tony agreed. "Then, somewhere along the line, Nangolat had a change of heart. I don't know why. Perhaps his research told him that the drought and earthquakes would follow the digging up of the golden skull only if it should be done by unbelievers like us. Perhaps if the faithful do the uncovering, the Ifugao gods will smile. I don't know. But Nangolat decided he wanted the expedition to help *him* find the artifacts."

"The old competitive spirit got him," Scotty murmured. "Wanted his side to win."

"Maybe," Tony said with a grin. "Anyway, he got

away with the earth scanner; he had it when Nast turned me over to him. Of course he couldn't use it. So he must have planned to capture one or all of us. He could have waited until the expedition got here, but things would then be complicated by our hiring diggers and camp helpers, which he knew we intended to do. Also, we intended to contact the road commissioner at Bontoc, a man who represents law and order—such as it is. So Nangolat, apparently, decided to stake everything on capturing us, forcing us to find the cache, then removing our heads. By the time the law got around to looking for us, the artifacts would be well hidden by the Ifugaos, and so would our bodies. Our skulls would be aging gracefully in some hidden place. And no Ifugao would know a single thing about it when questioned. It was a good scheme."

"Except for one thing," Rick corrected. "The terraces cover miles. We could spend weeks searching."

"There's one bit of evidence you don't have, boys. Remember that there is a major clue to the whereabouts of the cache? A dragon. Well, Nangolat knows—and has always known without knowing its significance until now—where the dragon is located."

Tony smiled at the interested faces around him. "And that's not all. I know where it is, too!"

CHAPTER XIV

Sign of the Dragon

THE convoy formed at dawn. One jeep was left with Pilipil, who had learned to drive while working for the United States Air Force. The other jeep, with Tony, Chahda, and Rick, went ahead as advance guard. The truck, with Scotty, Angel, Balaban, and Dog Meat, carried the equipment.

The earth scanner had been checked. It worked fine. Picks and shovels were ready, as were Tony's cleaning brushes, knives, and other tools. When electronic science had located the treasure, old-fashioned digging methods would have to unearth it.

Rifles, carbines, and the single shotgun were loaded and ready. Hunting knives hung at belts.

Rick, driving the lead jeep, followed the twisting road up into the clouds that always seemed to hover at the top of the divide. It was bitter cold, but they were

warmly dressed in clothing from their camp supplies. They kept a sharp lookout for Ifugao guards, but the road was deserted.

As the road descended into the Ifugao country, Tony kept watching for the first rice terrace. Soon he motioned to Rick. "Around this turn, I think. Slow."

Rick rounded the turn and emerged on a natural terrace overlooking Banaue Valley. The sun, just risen, was a golden ball veiled by mist. It gave the valley a warm, subdued light that reflected from the green rice, and from the sheen of water in some terraces.

It was a scene of indescribable beauty. For long moments the occupants of truck and jeep just looked and said nothing. Then Dog Meat and Balaban slipped from the truck and went down the road to take up guard positions.

Rick and Tony went to the truck and took the earth scanner from Scotty. They carried it to the edge of the natural terrace and set it up. The others joined them, weapons in hand.

Chahda watched with special interest as the covers were taken from the portable boxes. He had never seen the earth scanner in operation.

"Plenty magic, I bet. You scientists make poor native boy scared with this machine."

Rick snorted. "Come on and be useful, poor native boy. Connect these leads for me. They go into the fahnestock clips on those A batteries."

Chahda made the connection with the ease of one who has worked with electronic apparatus before, but he kept muttering about how the poor native boy was "plenty snowed" by wonderful scientists. Rick just grinned and went ahead with connecting up the scanner. Tony didn't quite know what to make of Chahda at first, but soon the Hindu boy's dexterity convinced him that Chahda was pulling his leg.

Scotty threatened Chahda with the butt end of his rifle. "I'd offer you to the Ifugaos, if I didn't know they can't use empty heads."

"You let that poor native boy alone," Rick said with false concern. He lifted the probe from its foam rubber-lined receptacle and plugged its cord into the control panel. The earth scanner was ready to operate.

Its appearance was not unusual. There was a power pack, consisting of batteries and a dynamotor, an amplifier, and a control panel. In the control panel was an oscilloscope. The probe looked like an aluminum pipe but was really a special tube built like a segment of coaxial cable. The sensing unit was in an inner core, surrounded by an atmosphere of pressurized helium. At the tip of the probe was the sensing element which looked very much like the Geiger tube of a radiation detector surrounded by a helical coil.

"Come on, you poor native, and I'll show you how it works," Rick invited.

"You not expect to find stuff here. You just testing?" Chahda asked.

"We want to get a standard pattern," Rick said. He pointed to the valley. "The terrace soil and rocks should be no different than those right here. So we'll get the typical response of these, and when we get to our location we won't have to take time—which could be important if we have Ifugao spear throwers shooting at us."

"What's typical response?" Chahda asked.

Rick showed him the helical coil at the end of the probe. "This coil is an antenna. It's shooting out electromagnetic waves of very high frequency. When those waves hit anything, some are reflected. The reflected waves are picked up by the tube inside the coil. You with me?"

"Way ahead of you," Chahda said. "Not all things reflect these waves the same, huh? Maybe the more dense, the better reflect. So loose earth not reflect too good, rocks little better, metal very good, and stuff like crystals best of all."

"Poor native boy," Tony said chidingly. "You knew how it worked all along."

Rick shook his head. "He's never seen it before, Tony. It's just that he's pretty quick on the uptake for a poor native boy."

Chahda grinned. "Okay, chums, I'll drop the gag. Go ahead, Rick, I not know everything yet. Why you testing here?"

"The minerals that make up the rocks and soil here will show a pattern. We'll mark the pattern on this

plastic screen." Rick indicated a circle of white plastic, scaled like the face of the oscilloscope. "Then, when we go hunting, we'll be looking for deviations from the pattern. For instance, there probably is no metal in the ground here. We're looking for metal. When we find it, the blip on the scope will stand out very plainly. Got it?"

"Think so. Sounds easy. Let's see it work."

Rick held the tip of the probe at waist level. Tony adjusted the controls until the scope flickered bright green. A vertical line on the face of the scope was a much lighter green, nearly white. Then, as Tony switched the activation circuit, the vertical line formed a pattern that varied in width from top to bottom. Here and there a blip, a clear horizontal line, thrust out both ways from the center.

The present pattern was not unlike that of a stylized Christmas tree, with broad blips representing branches at the base, and increasingly narrower ones representing the branches at the top. Rick quickly sketched the pattern on the plastic circle.

"Now watch," he said, and put his rifle on the ground under the probe.

The Christmas tree pattern developed a new element that ruined the design. It was a strong blip, thrusting out from center, about halfway up the pattern.

"Steel," Rick said. "Other metals with good reflection qualities would show blips slightly higher or lower on the scale."

"Some gadget," Chahda said admiringly. "What else you need know?"

"That's all." Tony was already closing the cover to the control panel. "We're ready to move. Rick, suppose we just set this stuff in the back of the jeep instead of disconnecting it? Chahda could carry the probe."

"Good idea. Then it will be ready for use."

Scotty and Angel had been watching for signs of life in the valley below. At Rick's hail they joined the group.

"Last instructions," Tony said. "We will try to persuade Nangolat that our intentions are good, that we do not want to violate taboos, and that we will do everything in our power to persuade the authorities that the artifacts should remain in the Ifugao country."

"If Nangolat is not there," Angel added, "I will explain to the Ifugaos that we are friends, that we are helping them to find sacred things that were lost many years ago."

"And if none of this works," Scotty picked up, "we will make one sweep with the scanner, looking for the cache, while holding off the Ifugaos. If they atttack, that is. If one sweep turns up nothing, we will then beat a retreat."

"We'll have to worry about spears," Tony said, "but the Ifugao spear is primarily a stabbing weapon, and they are not the marksmen that the Zulu is with an assagai. The risk will not be very great. I need not warn you to keep under cover as much as possible. And to shoot low if we must shoot. A leg wound will put a man

out of action just as effectively as a hole in the head, at least when his only weapon is a spear. We don't want bloodshed. We archaeologists are a peaceful lot."

"Let's go," Scotty said. He climbed into the truck. "Let's make peace with the Ifugaos."

"Put your truck into four-wheel drive," Rick called. He started the jeep, then shifted into his own four-wheel drive. Then, with a toot of the horn, he started off. A few yards down the road Balaban and Dog Meat were waiting. Scotty slowed to let them climb aboard. Then the two-vehicle caravan speeded up to the maximum the mountain road allowed.

Tony leaned forward, watching intently for the turn-off. Rick kept the jeep in second as he led the winding way down the mountainside toward the bottom of the valley. The road was dirt and badly rutted. If they should meet another car, one would have to back up until a turn-around was reached. But it was unlikely that another car would be out at this time of morning. Chances were that a car passed this way only once in a great while.

They were among the rice terraces now. No matter which way Rick looked, his eyes met terraces. Some were no bigger than table tops, perhaps filling a tiny space between bigger terraces. Some retaining walls were only a foot high, while the next step up or down the mountain might be a twenty-foot wall. Irregular giant

steps, green with growing rice. Here and there was one with no rice, showing a film of water.

Tony called, "Easy. We turn just a short distance ahead." In another quarter mile he pointed. "Take that road."

It was little more than a path that wound a corkscrew way among the terraces, hugging the mountain wall. This was the way Nangolat had brought Tony, not even bothering to blindfold him. Rick held the wheel tightly to keep it from jerking out of his hands on impact with a rock. Then, ahead, the road suddenly leveled. Rick recognized the scene. He had been here before, last night, during the hours of darkness.

The mist had not yet cleared, and the limits on his vision made the scene seem more like it had last night. He knew that to the left, three terraces down, was the village. Now he could see that to the right of the road was a small meadow or very large terrace. He couldn't tell which. The meadow ran perhaps a hundred and fifty feet from the road to the base of a retaining wall. It was a very high wall, perhaps as much as sixty feet. Rick hadn't seen another nearly so high.

"Turn right," Tony said. "Go into the meadow."

Rick dropped the jeep back into low gear and swung the wheel. The jeep climbed over a single row of rocks and moved easily across the meadow. Rick thought the row of rocks probably constituted a retaining wall, so

that made it a terrace instead of a meadow. Anyway, it was firm under the tires.

Behind the jeep, Scotty took the truck over the row of stones as easily as he would have negotiated a high curbing at home. He followed Rick across the meadow.

Rick could see now that in the base of the high retaining wall was a considerable recess. He asked, with mounting excitement, "Is the dragon there?"

Tony nodded. "Let's turn around and back into the recess as far as possible. We want to be facing out, in case we have to leave in a hurry."

Rick did so, then directed Scotty. Not until the vehicles were in place did they run into the recess and look.

There on a pedestal, a smaller edition of the one Rick had first seen at Alta Yuan, was the dragon!

CHAPTER XV

Under the Dragon's Claws

THE Spindrift group jumped into action. Rick, Tony, and Chahda carried the earth scanner into the recess and set it up. Scotty consulted with Angel, and at a word from the Filipino, Balaban the Igorot climbed the wall to the terrace above their heads where he sprawled among the rice with rifle ready.

Angel moved to the left about fifty feet, while Scotty moved the same distance to the right. Dog Meat ran down the meadow to the road, crossed the terrace, and took up a watch on the village.

"Work fast," Tony said. "They must know we're here. If they didn't see us, they at least heard the motors."

Rick was already at work. He plugged in the probe, checked the controls, then turned them over to Tony. The scientist set the controls and turned on the activation switch.

Rick moved the probe in a long sweep, starting in

front of the dragon, while Tony and Chahda watched the scope.

"Standard pattern," Tony reported. "Keep it moving . . . no change . . . no change . . ."

Rick stepped sideways and moved the probe through a slightly different arc. "No change . . ."

Again Rick took a step and swung the probe. He kept moving until the probe had nearly covered the ground in front of the dragon, then he took a position next to the bronze statue and covered the ground directly under its nose.

"Wait!" There was excitement in Tony's voice. "You're on something!"

"Metal?" Rick asked quickly.

"No. It's not a metal response. Some kind of stone, but not the usual type found around here."

Tony had a pad out and was making a sketch of the recess, marking the position of the dragon. Then, while Rick moved the probe through a new arc, his pencil shaded in the area where the odd response showed on the scope.

Rick repeated the scanning process to one side of the dragon, and again the response was normal until he got close. He changed sides, and the result was the same. Then he went to the rear of the dragon, expecting a changed response there. But the results were identical. At last he gave up, feeling a bit let down, and joined Tony and Chahda. They were examining Tony's sketch.

"Plenty clear to me," Chahda said. "Right under old man dragon is round hole. See?"

Chahda was right. The changed responses, when charted on Tony's sketch, showed a circle about six feet in diameter with its center directly under the dragon.

"But no metal," Tony said. "That's odd."

Rick frowned. "It can't be an underground base for the dragon," he said. "A base would be close to the surface. This response seems to start about two feet under."

He stared out across the meadow and noted that Dog Meat was trotting toward them, but he paid no attention because his mind was working on the problem.

"It could be a crypt of some kind," he said. He went to the truck and got a shovel. "I have an idea." He went to work.

Dog Meat arrived and chattered excitedly. Angel came running, listened, and translated.

"The village is up in arms. Nangolat is making a speech and the young men are getting ready to make war."

Rick dug, working on a shaft under the dragon's pedestal. The earth was packed hard and he had to get a pick. Tony relieved him, and they took turns until the shaft slanted in to what they estimated was a point directly under the center of the pedestal.

"Now," Rick said, and took the probe. He put it into the shaft and watched expectantly while Tony adjusted the controls. Suddenly the scope flickered, breaking up

the Christmas tree pattern. There were at least three different responses, two of them definitely in the metals range.

"This it it!" Tony yelled. "It has to be! Rick, that was an inspiration. The cache is right under the dragon!"

There was another yell, from outside the recess. It was Balaban, on the terrace above. "They come!"

For the moment the find was forgotten. The Spindrift party stood between the truck and jeep watching as nearly a hundred Ifugao warriors walked with menacing silence to the edge of the meadow and stopped.

Nangolat, naked except for a breechcloth, stepped from the ranks of Ifugao warriors. He held a spear a foot taller than he, a vicious weapon with a triangular point and flared base.

The Ifugao walked ceremoniously across the meadow to a point twenty yards in front of the recess. "You're trapped," he said. His voice trembled with hatred. "You can't get away from us now. Come out and throw down your weapons."

Tony stepped forward, rifle held carelessly under his arm. He stopped ten paces in front of the Ifugao.

"We and you want the same thing," he said. "The artifacts."

Nangolat thrust the metal-shod base of his spear into the earth. "We want the same thing, but for different reasons. I want to preserve the sacred objects of my people. You want to desecrate them."

"That's not true," Tony replied. "When we touch

them it will be with reverence, with respect for the gods of Banaue. Then, when we have collected them all, we will buy many pigs for a great feast of thanksgiving for all the people of Ifugao. The sacred objects will be used by your priests for ceremonies. Then you, Nangolat, will go with us when we carry them to Manila. In Manila we will measure them and photograph them and make sketches. These methods are familiar to you."

Tony paused, searching Nangolat's face for some sign of a change in his attitude. "When we are done, we will ask to see the president of the Philippines. We will petition him to assist in the building of a temple-museum on this very spot. My scientific foundation will give the first donation for this purpose. Dr. Okola will help. Then, I hope, the sacred objects can come back to Ifugao to stay forever, in a place where all Ifugaos may see them."

Tony held out his hand, palm upward. "Is that desecration?"

Nangolat leaned forward, half bowing in his excitement. "The artifacts must not leave Ifugao!"

"You know Dr. Okola," Tony replied. "Would he insist that they go to Manila? I would not. I could take photographs and measurements right here. The objects need not leave here, so far as I am concerned. That would be between you and the Filipino authorities."

Nangolat was obviously impressed. "Wait," he commanded. "I must talk with the priests."

He turned on his heel and walked back to the waiting

Ifugao warriors. Several men detached themselves from the group and followed as he led the way across the terrace toward the village.

Rick breathed freely for the first time. "Tony, I think he's going for it!"

"I certainly hope so," the scientist said with relief. "But regardless of how the decision goes, the artifacts must be collected. Let's get some work done."

How to get the dragon away from the underground crypt was solved with the truck winch. The cable was passed around the pedestal and the whole business hauled forward. Then Rick, Scotty, Angel, and Chahda began to dig while Tony examined each inch of progress for signs that the crypt was being reached.

A whistle came from outside. Dog Meat beckoned. The party stopped digging and hurried out in time to see a station wagon come to a halt on the road above the village. Six men got out and were met by an elderly Ifugao. But before they were ushered to the village they took time to stare at the Spindrift expedition.

The Spindrift group stared back with a combination of fear, disappointment, and disgust. Four of the men were strangers. One was an American—James Nast. The sixth was the Assistant Secretary of the Interior!

CHAPTER XVI

Flying Spears

"Just like the old saying," Rick observed. "Birds of a feather flock together. A crooked Filipino, a crooked American, and a crazy Ifugao are now in conference. And what is the conference about?"

"They talk about who wins next World Series," Chahda suggested brightly.

Scotty scoffed at the idea. "They aren't sports lovers, Chahda. They are gentlemen of culture. I think the conference is about motion pictures. My idea is that Lazada and Nast are visiting Nangolat in order to get an Ifugao opinion on whether the hero should be allowed to kiss his horse in western pictures."

Tony Briotti leaned on his shovel. "I can't see how you can be so wrong when the evidence is so clear. Isn't Lazada the Assistant Secretary of the Interior? Isn't this the Interior? I think the Ifugao terraces are about to be converted to a national park, under the Department of

the Interior. The Assistant Secretary is here to discuss the hot-dog concession with a local bigwig. Of course he has his American hot-dog expert with him. It's as simple as that."

Scotty checked his rifle carefully, sighting down the barrel to make sure it was mirror clean. "They could also be talking about building a new swimming pool for Ifugao boys and girls, but somehow I doubt it. What say we not worry about what they're saying to each other, and worry instead about digging?"

"Right as usual," Tony said. "Let's keep at it, and perhaps we'll come up with something worth talking about."

They had made a good start. Now, working two by two, they excavated until the shovels rang from stone. Scraping disclosed a flat stone that probably was a lid of some kind. They resumed digging until the stone was completely exposed, then tried to lift it.

"Weighs a ton," Rick grunted. "Did it move at all?"

"Not that I could see," Tony said. "Let's dig down around the edges more and see if the stone is anchored."

Further digging showed that the stone was not anchored. It probably had been set in some kind of primitive mortar which would have to be broken before the stone could be lifted. A crowbar from the truck supplied leverage and in a moment the stone was free. Willing hands found holds, lifted it free, and slid it to the back of the recess. Where the stone had been there now

yawned a circular opening about the size of a manhole.

Tony Briotti was beside himself with excitement. He ran to the truck, rummaged in the supplies, and produced a flashlight. Then he ran back to the hole and directed the beam downward.

The boys crowded around to look. Rick exclaimed in disappointment. The hole was about eight feet deep and about four feet in diameter. The walls were coated with green slime and on the bottom there was a mixed coating of mud and slime and nothing else.

"False alarm," he said sadly.

Tony paid no attention. He went to the truck again, and from his own crate of supplies he produced rope and two galvanized steel buckets. He also found boots and rubber gloves, a small hand shovel, and an ordinary garden hand tool with three prongs. These tools he thrust into his belt.

"I'm going down," he announced.

Rick realized that Tony was not taking for granted the apparent emptiness of the hole. He realized, too, that Tony knew much more about such caches than he. "Okay," he said. "Angel, keep a watch. We don't want to get caught by surprise while Tony is digging."

"I've been watching," Angel said. "And we're also being watched by Ifugaos, on the terraces above the village."

Chahda looked into the hole doubtfully. "How you get in and out, Tony? No ladder."

"The rope," Tony said. "You'll have to lower me, or hold the rope so I can climb down."

"We'll lower you," Scotty said. He took the rope and made a loop for Tony's foot, then directed the archaeologist to sit on the edge of the hole. Tony did so, putting his foot through the loop. Then Rick, Scotty, and Chahda payed out rope while the scientist let himself slide from the edge into the hole. In a moment the rope went slack. He was on the bottom.

Rick watched while Tony drove his hunting knife into the wall of the hole and hung his flashlight on it, the beam shooting downward. Then Tony took his shovel from his belt and probed the soft earth carefully. It was so soft that his boots sank in up to the ankles.

Presently Tony called, "Something here. Get a bucket." He worked with the shovel and unearthed a small, mud-covered object, then another, then a whole series of them.

Scotty tied a bucket to the rope and lowered it. Tony put the muddy collection in it and Scotty drew it up.

"Send the rope back for me," Tony called.

The three boys helped to pull him up. He immediately sat down on the ground with the bucket between his legs and started to clean his findings.

"Rick," he requested, "get me the bag of cloths and brushes from my case, please?"

Rick did so. Tony removed most of the mud by wiping it off with his gloves. Then brushes and cloths com-

pleted the job. He held up a human jawbone, inlaid with gold. His eyes sparkled. "Typical, except for the gold. The human jawbone is a common Ifugao relic. In fact, they suspend their musical instruments from human jawbones." He put it down carefully and started to work on the next object. It turned out to be a pipe, again typical Ifugao work except for the fact that it was of gold.

Rick examined it. He had seen pipes something like it before, but made of clay. "I thought tobacco was an American product," he observed. "How come these primitive Asiatics had it?"

"Asia used tobacco long before the Indians introduced it to Europeans," Tony replied. "But it's curious that the pipe forms should be so similar. That pipe was made by a process we now use in America for very delicate castings. It is called the 'lost wax' process."

"Funny name," Chahda said, interested.

"Yes, until you know about the process. The Ifugao makes the pipe he wants out of wax, then coats it with clay, leaving a hole in the clay. Then he puts the clay in the fire. The clay hardens, but the wax melts and runs out. The Ifugao, then, has a mold exactly like the pipe he made of wax. He melts the metal he chooses—gold, in this case—and pours it into the clay mold. When the metal cools, he breaks off the mold, and there is his pipe."

"Lost wax," Scotty said. "You're right. It fits."

At that moment Angel Manotok came into the recess. "I've been listening. Don't think I'm presuming, please, but could we work faster? Perhaps talk about it later?"

Angel was right, of course. Tony said, "I shouldn't have taken the time to clean these things. We'll collect them mud and all." He went back into the hole and worked rapidly, filling the buckets as fast as the boys could haul them up.

Rick thought that the crypt probably was dry when the objects were first placed in it. But the water used to irrigate the rice terraces had seeped through between the carefuly selected stones that lined the pit, bringing fine particles of dirt and gradually building up a reservoir of mud in the bottom. Most of the water seeped in and seeped out again, but the particles of soil remained.

Tony suddenly gave a cry. "I think I have it!" He braced an object on his knee and wiped it. "It is! And by its weight, it's thick-walled but hollow! What a find! Boys, this is wonderful! Tremendous!"

The scientist tried to place the muddy object in a bucket, but it was too large to fit. He called, "Can one of you lean away in? I'll hold it up as high as I can."

Tony's excavations had taken him down another two feet, but with Chahda and Scotty holding onto his legs, Rick was able to reach in and take the object from Tony's outstretched hands. It was bulky, slightly larger than a human head, and it was heavy—as heavy as lead, or gold!

Scotty and Chahda pulled Rick out of the pit, then they lowered the rope for Tony. In a moment he was working on the object, wiping and brushing. There was a yellow gleam to it now, and the shape was becoming more and more skull-like as the mud was removed. Tony worked rapidly, and in a few moments he held it up for them to see. It was a skull, finely executed of heavy sheet gold, and the workmanship bore the unmistakable stamp of Alta Yuan.

"We've succeeded," Tony said, his voice hushed. "Beyond my wildest expectations!"

And in that moment Dog Meat and Angel called simultaneously.

The Ifugao warriors were advancing across the field in ominous silence, spears ready. Nast and Lazada were nowhere in sight, but at the head of the warriors was Nangolat!

Hastily the golden artifacts were put out of sight in the recess and Tony walked to meet the oncoming Ifugaos.

Scotty pulled the retractor of his rifle and a cartridge rammed into the firing chamber. He held the rifle casually, but ready for instant action.

Nangolat came closer, and his face was distorted with emotion. He held the spear in his fist, ready for stabbing or throwing. When he spoke, his voice, usually moderate, was nearly a scream.

"I almost believed you," he sobbed. "But now I know

the truth! You are here to desecrate our temples and to rob us of the precious relics of my people."

Then the Ifugao saw that the dragon had been moved. He bared his teeth with fury and his eyes were glazed, black with emotion. He was beyond reason.

"Die!" he screamed. "Die!"

His hand flashed back for the throw. Scotty's rifle spoke sharply and the heavy slug caught the blade of Nangolat's spear. The Ifugao was whirled around bodily. He fell as the spear was wrenched from him and hurled a dozen yards away.

It was the signal. The Ifugao warriors rushed, launching spears as they came. Rick pulled Tony back to the shelter of the truck. Angel, Scotty, and Chahda were calmly firing at the oncoming wave, shooting low with deadly accuracy. From the terrace above, Balaban was firing down with good effect, while Dog Meat whammed away with the shotgun.

Spears bounced off the truck, the jeep, and the dragon. Now and then one hung quivering in the wall of the recess, but the Spindrift group had good shielding and there were no casualties.

The attackers were wavering now. A priest with a knot of chicken feathers in his hair leaped forward, holding a skull high. Rick guessed it was an important symbol of some kind, because he saw the warriors rally. He sighted in and his shot blasted the skull into fragments. The wave broke and retreated.

Tony made a quick examination to be sure there were no casualties. Out on the meadow several wounded Ifugaos, all of them with leg wounds, were being helped to safety.

"We can thank Nast and Lazada for this," Tony said bitterly. Do you realize that we are in a very bad position?"

The Ifugao warriors were reforming. Nangolat, recovered from the numbing shock of Scotty's shot, stormed among them, getting them ready for another assault. But Nangolat was no longer waving a spear. He was now armed with a rifle.

CHAPTER XVII

Make or Break

"We can stand off their assaults," Tony said. "We can't stand sniping. Not for long, at any rate."

Scotty grinned. "Neither can Nangolat. Let's see if I can fix his wagon."

They watched as Scotty wet his finger, tested for wind direction, then set the sights on his rifle. On the other side of the road Nangolat was exhorting his troops like a good general, waving his rifle to emphasize his words.

Scotty took a classic sharpshooter's position, relaxed but braced. Rick saw him inhale and hold it. The rifle muzzle moved slowly, following Nangolat's movements. Then, suddenly, the rifle spoke.

Nangolat was thrown into the midst of his warriors, while his rifle, its stock shattered, flailed into the ranks and knocked two warriors down. And then Nangolat went berserk. He snatched a spear from one of his men,

turned, and ran toward the defenders, screaming. A priest barked an order and two warriors dashed forward, caught Nangolat, and hauled him back by force.

"The old priest had sense enough to know Nangolat wouldn't make it," Angel said.

"All right," Tony said crisply. "We're trapped in here. It's not a bad place to be trapped for a while. They can't get at us without crossing open spaces, and there is enough overhang to the wall to prevent them from dropping rocks on our heads. Also, Balaban is up there to warn us if they try anything from that direction. But we can't stay here forever. We need help. How do we get it?"

"It has to be the constabulary at Baguio," Rick said. "There isn't any other help nearby. If worst comes to worst, I suppose we could call the American ambassador and try to get him to send Air Force troops from Clark Field."

"By the time diplomatic protocol and military red tape got untangled we'd be old men," Scotty objected. "If we lived to be old men. Also, you overlooked one little thing. How do we get a message to them?"

"Wait until night and one of us sneak out."

Tony looked at his watch. "We won't last until night," he said succinctly. "It's still early morning."

Rick examined the terrain between the cave and the road, noting where the station wagon Lazada had brought was parked.

"I'm going," he said. "Let history record that Rick Brant carried a message to . . ."

"Not Garcia," Chahda said. "That was in Cuba, says my Worrold Alminack. Carry message to cops."

"How?" Scotty demanded.

"You create a diversion. I'll get in the jeep and make a run for it."

Scotty considered. "It could work. But I'll do it."

"My idea," Rick said firmly. "I'll do it."

Tony was deep in thought. After all, the safety of the expedition was his responsibility. "I got us into this," he said. "Bad judgment is no excuse. I was certain it would work out."

"Would have, if Lazada had stayed home," Chahda said. "I go with Rick. He drive, I shoot. Okay?"

"There doesn't seem to be any alternative," Tony agreed. "Staying or going makes little difference, so far as danger is concerned. All right, Rick. We can create a diversion when they start to charge next time. If we start the truck and roll it toward the village, I'm sure we can create a little excitement."

"That's smart," Scotty approved. "The truck would go right on across the road, across the terrace, and tumble down. It wouldn't hit the village, though. It would land on the next terrace."

"I doubt that they'd think of that in the excitement," Tony commented. "But take away the jeep and truck and you take away our good cover from spears. We need an earthwork fort, quickly. All hands turn to."

There were tools enough. While the Ifugao warriors argued among themselves, and Nangolat, somewhat calmed down, tried to work them up to a new pitch of excitement, the Spindrift group dug. Within a few minutes there was a very respectable earthen berm across the front of the recess. The riflemen could lie behind it and be reasonably protected from spears.

They were just in time, too. The Ifugaos were steadying down and Nangolat had a spear in his hand once more.

"I'll start the truck," Scotty said quickly. "Head for them, then jump out, leaving it in first. Don't start the jeep until I'm moving. We should be able to hold them off until you return in the Sky Wagon."

Rick suddenly realized that the steel poles for the pickup cable were with the gear on the truck. He reminded Scotty of the fact. "I'll snatch Tony's loot right out of your hands," he said. "That will take some of the heart out of them."

"Or make them madder," Scotty added. They hurried to unload the truck. Chahda checked his rifle.

"Make or break," Rick said. "If I make it, fine. If not, that breaks our chances down to zero. But I'll make it."

Scotty ran for the truck cab, climbed in, and started the engine. The Ifugaos stopped their yelling to look. For a moment they milled around, uncertain, then Scotty threw the truck into gear and started directly for them.

Rick and Chahda jumped into the jeep. Rick started

the engine and pulled out the choke slightly to avoid a possible stall. Scotty leaped from the truck, leaving the unmanned vehicle to bounce across the meadow directly toward the ranks of the Ifugaos! They hesitated, then scattered—and Rick stepped on the gas.

He angled the jeep across the meadow, coaxing maximum speed out of it, paying no attention to ruts or bumps. From beside him came the sharp crack of Chahda's rifle. Once a spear passed overhead and dug into the rice beyond.

Then Rick slowed for the stone blocks at the edge of the meadow and let the jeep climb over them to the road. A spear clanged off the rear and another ripped the rear-seat cushion. Chahda fired one shot after another, muttering to himself in Hindi.

They were on the road! Rick gave the jeep all it would take. In his rear-view mirror he caught a glimpse of Ifugaos pursuing him, of the truck stopped at the edge of the meadow, then they were around the curve of a terrace wall, free.

Rick kept the accelerator to the floor except on the worst curves. They climbed out of the valley, crossed the ridge, and emerged at their camp. Pilipil was waiting. They slowed long enough to yell instructions to strike the tents and cooking gear, and load them in the jeep and be ready to leave on a moment's notice, then they drove down the mountain at breakneck speed, with Chahda holding on for dear life. Fortunately, they had

to pass through only one gate, and the gatekeeper waved them right through. They passed Igorot villages, narrowly missing chickens and pigs, then bounced across a river bed and into Bontoc.

The trip had taken one hour. The boys pulled up in front of the road commissioner's office and ran in. De los Santos met them. "You are excited!" he exclaimed. "Is something wrong?"

"Very wrong," Rick replied. "We must use your phone. How do I get Baguio?"

"I will get it for you. Who do you want?"

"The constabulary!"

Santos looked startled, but he cranked the phone several times, talked in Ilokano, and finally handed the phone to Rick.

A voice at the other end said, "Constabulary detachment. Corporal Alvarez."

Rick said quickly, "We need help at Banaue. A party of Americans are trapped by Ifugaos. Unless they get help quickly, they'll all be killed!"

Corporal Alvarez replied, "There must be a mistake. The Ifugaos are peaceful."

"Not any more," Rick yelled. "I just came from there. They're throwing spears. They mean business!"

Suddenly the corporal was unable to understand. Rick yelled, begged, and threatened, to no avail. At last he hung up, defeated. "Something's fishy," he said. "Very fishy. The corporal knew what I meant, I'm sure. He

treated it as a joke. Chahda, Lazada is behind this!"

Santos coughed. Rick whirled on him. "What do you know about it?"

"Nothing, I assure you."

The man was lying. Rick was sure of it. He grabbed him by the lapels and said, "Talk. Talk! My friends may lose their lives unless we can do something."

Chahda took a hunting knife from his belt and put the point against Santos' throat. "Talk," he said gently. "You have two seconds." He pushed a little.

Santos' light-brown complexion turned dirty gray. "All right," he gasped. "I am a good man, but Lazada is my boss. I do not like what he has done. Last night he stayed here, and I heard him talk to the American, Nast. They laughed about how they had told the constabulary that a group of crazy Americans were up here and would be calling them with a practical joke, to which they should not pay attention. They told the constabulary this both in Baguio and Manila."

"And they believed him, because he is Assistant Secretary of the Interior," Rick said bitterly. "Now what? We'll never convince them. He couldn't order them not to help, so he planted a story that would do the same thing. The only thing I can do now is call the American ambassador and see if he can go through diplomatic channels to get help."

"Take too much time," Chahda said. "It will be too late."

Santos muttered in the native dialect.

"What was that?" Rick asked sharply.

"Filipino saying. 'What good is hay to a dead horse.' "

"Wait!" Rick had a quick mental image of the Filipino officer who had first spoken the phrase. Colonel Felix Rojas. He would believe the story. Hadn't he warned them?

"Get me Manila," Rick said. "Quickly. Constabulary Headquarters!"

It took time. It seemed like an hour, but was only fifteen minutes. And Colonel Felix Rojas was on the wire.

Rick talked fast, telling the colonel the whole story, including Chahda's espionage activities. When he had finished, Rojas said crisply, "No time to get troops there. It will take planes. I will send a fighter plane first. Then will come a platoon of paratroopers, if I can get the Army to move fast enough. But it will be two hours before the troopers can get there, even with the best speed possible. The fighter will be there in an hour. Tell your friends to hold out. Return to Manila as soon as your party is safe. See no one, talk to no one until you see me."

The colonel rang off.

"An hour," Rick said. "And an hour after that before the paratroopers arrive. Can they hold out?"

"They must," Chahda said flatly.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Sky Wagon

THE Sky Wagon climbed out of the valley at Bontoc and Rick set a course for Banaue. He took his pad and wrote a note to his friends, telling them of his conversation with Colonel Rojas and of the trick Lazada had pulled. He wrapped the note around a wrench and tied it with a piece of string.

Behind him, Chahda was busy with the bags for the cable pickup. He had already removed the hatch. He tied the bags in two bundles and put them in a handy place, to be tossed to the Spindrift group, then he got into the seat next to Rick.

"We pick up stuff, even though constabulary coming to rescue?"

Rick nodded. "The plane can do nothing but scare the Ifugaos off. That wouldn't prevent them from trying to capture the golden skull, anyway. And even after troops land, that stuff is too valuable and too tempting. Don't

forget Lazada is on the scene. He could take over from the troopers and they wouldn't dare say no."

"True," Chahda agreed. "Better we get it. What you thinking about this deal with Lazada? Why does Nangolat trust him? And what does he want?"

"You told us the answers in Baguio," Rick reminded him. "Lazada told Nangolat he couldn't refuse a permit —which we never got, by the way—but that he would hinder us in other ways. Nangolat thinks Lazada is his friend, all right. Lazada must have told him that our real plans were to carry off the golden skull, probably to America. And why?"

"Because Lazada wants Ifugaos to massacre us after we have located skull," Chahda said. "That way, no witness. Dead men not telling stories on witness stand. Then Lazada and Nast shoot poor Nangolat and take stuff. Or something like that."

"Nice people," Rick commented.

The Sky Wagon was crossing the ridge. Soon they would be back on the scene. Chahda got into the rear seat, ready to throw the message and bags out through the access hatch.

"Wait until I signal," Rick reminded him, and put the Sky Wagon into a dive. He followed the road for a distance, then saw the truck and used that for a landmark. As he flashed past the Spindrift refuge he saw that the Ifugao warriors were in a semicircle around the

edge of the meadow. Apparently the siege was still on. Now to drop the message. He gauged his distance and altitude. He wanted to be sure the message landed within reach.

"Get ready," he called, and circled until he was headed directly at the recess. When a crash into the terrace wall seemed imminent he yelled, "Now," and zoomed up into a screaming wing over. When he circled again, Tony and Scotty were reading the message.

The second time around, Chahda dropped the bags. Then there was a wait while Scotty and Angel set up the pickup poles.

The Ifugaos were obviously curious, nor were they the only ones. Rick saw Lazada, Nast, and the rest of their party emerge from the village and walk to a place on the terrace just beyond the meadow. They could not be seen by anyone within the recess, but they could watch what was going on in the meadow.

Scotty knew that Rick could not make pickups while flying toward the recess, so he was setting up the poles in such a way that Rick could fly parallel to the terrace wall in which the recess was located.

The pickup was very simple. Each bag was attached to a circle of cable about eight feet in diameter. When ready for pickup, the bag was put on the ground between the two poles and its cable was placed on angle irons at the tops of the poles. The cable was not anchored. The only purpose of the poles was to lift the

cable far enough off the ground for convenient pickup.

Soon the first bag was in place and Scotty and Tony retired to the recess to watch. Rick pushed a button on his control board and the cable in the rear of the plane unwound. It was heavy, woven steel, terminating in a weighted six-inch hook.

Rick knew from many previous pickups the altitude at which to fly. He circled for the run, dropped to the correct altitude, and glued the plane's nose on the poles. The Sky Wagon passed over the poles, and the hook on its cable caught the cable stretched between the poles. That cable slid off the supports. The fast-moving plane took up the slack and the bag of artifacts was jerked from the ground. A touch of the button and the electric motor reeled it in. Chahda pulled the bag through the hatch, unhooked it, and put it in the luggage compartment. They were ready for another run.

Tony had dug up enough stuff for seven bags. That was a lot of artifacts. Each time Rick asked, "Was that one the skull?" And Chahda would shake his head.

The seventh bag was the skull. Rick was sure because of the clasped-hands wave Scotty gave him, and because Tony did not retreat into the recess. As Rick turned for his run he saw the sleek form of a military plane slip past. Help had arrived. He sighed his relief and held up his run to watch. The plane buzzed the Ifugaos and dropped a container with streamers attached. An Ifugao —Rick thought it was Nangolat—ran to get it.

Rick could imagine what the note said. "Do not attempt further harm to the Americans or your village will be bombed." Or some similar threat. Nangolat might not like it, but he would obey.

"Here we go," Rick said. He put the Sky Wagon on course and held it steady. The poles passed from sight and there was a strong jerk on the plane. That skull was heavy.

"Bag tearing! Reel in!" Chahda yelled.

Rick pushed the button and the winch whined, then suddenly screamed as the load was released. Gone! The skull was gone! He swung in a vertical bank just in time to see Nast lift the bag to his shoulder. Rick pounded the seat beside him with helpless rage!

The golden skull had fallen within reach of Nast and Lazada; it was in the hands of the enemy. Rick swung in a tight circle and saw them run to the station wagon and climb in.

"They waste no time," Chahda said bitterly. "That Lazada, he move fast."

"We'll never see that skull again," Rick muttered. "What rotten luck!"

The Hindu boy's face tightened with determination. "We get that skull back. Rick, fly to Bontoc. Open throttle wide and let us go!"

"There's nothing we can do at Bontoc," Rick objected. "No one there, or in Baguio either, would dare question Lazada."

"Go to Bontoc," Chahda urged. "Leave this to me, Rick. Chahda will take over."

"But what can you do?"

"I will know when the chance comes. You and Scotty will be ready. Somehow, some place, we will get our chance—and the golden skull will be ours again!"

CHAPTER XIX

The Nipa Hut

COLONEL Felix Rojas paced the floor of Tony Briotti's room in the Manila Hotel. He was in uniform now, but his visit, as he made quite clear, was not official. At least not yet.

Rick had just finished relating the story of how the golden skull had fallen into the hands of Lazada. "Can't you just go to him and demand the skull?" he asked.

Rojas smiled sadly. "If only it were that simple. Suppose two Malays arrived at your Department of Defense and claimed that your Assistant Secretary of the Interior had stolen a valuable Indian necklace from an archaeological expedition. What would happen?"

Rick knew perfectly well what would happen. "They would get thrown out—if they could get anyone to listen to them in the first place."

"Exactly. The situation is not particularly different, except that I'm sure we pay more attention to Americans

here than you would to Malays in your country. After all, you owned us for nearly half a century."

"You warned us," Scotty said. "Why?"

Rojas shrugged. "I may as well be frank. I knew of Nangolat's visits to Lazada. In fact, I was present at one meeting. And I knew that our esteemed Assistant Secretary was hungry for that buried gold. If I could prove some of the things I know about that man, he would no longer hold public office. He would be in jail. My hands were tied, officially, but unofficially I tried to warn you. I couldn't come right out and denounce Lazada."

"Of course not," Tony agreed. "We're grateful that you were able to say as much as you did."

Rojas nodded. "Let us continue. After you flew back to Bontoc, what happened?"

Rick picked up his tale. "Pilipil was on the mountain, waiting. We dropped down and signaled for him to go to Banaue in the jeep, then we landed at Bontoc and picked up the other jeep. Chahda became an Igorot again. He took the jeep and started for Baguio right away, while I stayed behind in Bontoc."

"I don't get the point of that," Rojas interrupted.

"Chahda intended to follow Lazada or Nast, whoever had the skull. They were coming over the mountain in a fast station wagon, and there were only two routes they could take—north to the Kalinga country, or south to Baguio. We didn't think they would go north. So

Chahda started for Baguio, knowing that they would probably catch up to him before the jeep reached the Baguio gate. They were in so much of a hurry that they would not suspect an Igorot who pulled to the side of the one-lane road to let them pass him, which would make trailing them easier."

"Smart," Rojas said. "Then your friends arrived at Bontoc late that afternoon, and you flew them back to Baguio, leaving Angel Manotok to bring the truck."

"Yes. Of course we paid off Pilipil, Balaban, and the Igorots who had guarded the plane. Dog Meat rode back with Angel."

"And you haven't heard from your Hindu friend since?"

"No."

Rojas picked up his cap. "I would like very much to find Lazada with that golden skull in his possession. It would be a major service to the Philippines, because it would give the Secretary and the President positive grounds for his dismissal. I ask a favor. If you hear from your friend, will you let me know?"

"First thing," Tony Briotti promised.

When the constabulary colonel had gone, the three washed up and went downstairs. Tony was restless and Rick knew that he wanted to get to work on the artifacts they had flown down to Manila. The Ifugao treasure, minus the skull, was under guard at the university museum.

"Go on out to the museum," Rick said. "You're so restless I'm beginning to itch just watching you."

"Same here," Scotty agreed. "Go on, Tony. We'll wait here for word from Chahda."

"I really would like to," Tony said. "Perhaps I will, if you'll let me know the moment Chahda comes."

The boys promised to do so and Tony departed. They found comfortable chairs in the lounge and ordered fresh limeades.

"Angel should be arriving with the truck tomorrow," Scotty observed.

"Yes, with Dog Meat. Wonder if Chahda will be back by then?"

"I wish he'd let us know where he is," Scotty grumbled. "For all we know, Lazada may have captured him and tossed him into Manila Bay."

A waiter approached. "Ask him where our limeades are," Scotty said. "I'm thirsty. And I'm getting hungry."

"Again? We finished dinner less than an hour ago."

"It didn't seem like dinner," Scotty explained. "I can't get used to eating when the sun is high in the sky. I don't care what time it is, it should be dark when we eat. Now it's dusk and I'm hungry."

The waiter bowed. "Phone call for you, Mr. Brant—or Mr. Scott."

"Thank you. Wonder who this can be?"

"Chahda?" Scotty asked.

"That would be too much to hope for. Besides, he

sends notes whenever he can. Doesn't like to phone."

But it was Chahda. He gave them rapid instructions. Dress in dark clothing. Meet him at Parañaque, a town to the south, just below the airport. Hurry. Chahda hung up. He had obviously been excited.

Rick and Scotty ran for their room. They changed clothes, then Rick tried to phone Tony at the museum. There was no answer. Constabulary Headquarters regretted that Colonel Rojas did not answer the phone in his quarters. They would send a messenger to find him. Rick left the message that he and Scotty were meeting Chahda, then the boys hurried to the desk and left a similar message for Tony.

A taxi took them to Parañaque. Like most small towns in the Philippines it consisted of a cathedral, a market, a *botica* or drugstore, and a few houses.

They found Chahda in front of the cathedral. He was dressed Filipino style in slacks and sport shirt, and his hair had been recut to a modified crew cut—the only cut possible after the Igorot one.

They dismissed the taxi. Chahda had the jeep. While he drove them through a backwoods road, he told them his story. He had pulled off the one-lane road to let Lazada and Nast pass just before he reached Baguio. Following them had been no problem from then on. They went to a house on the outskirts of Baguio, and by asking a few questions of the house servants—after first loosening their tongues with a few pesos—he had found

that Lazada was proceeding on to Manila by car the following morning.

"There was a chance he might give Nast the skull to take care of," Chahda admitted, "but I not think so. Lazada not the kind of man with liking for letting gold out of his hands. So I go to barbershop, get haircut, pick up clothes where I left them with a friend of Dog Meat. Then I drive to Manila and stop at Malolos."

That was a town to the north of Manila on the road to Baguio. Chahda had pulled the same trick of letting Lazada overtake him.

"He comes by, and Nast is with him," Chahda continued. "I am surprised, because Lazada goes right to his house. I wait around nearly all day. Cannot call, because no phone handy. Well, tonight he took black limousine, and he and Nast come to Parañaque. He has skull. They go to this little barrio where we going, and go into nipa shack. Lazada stays there with the skull. Nast goes off in the limousine. So what I think?"

"What do you think?" Rick asked.

"I think Nast goes to get somebody, to bring them to Lazada. So I rush off and call you. Before you came, I saw Nast go by. So now the meeting is being held, and we must figure how to get the skull."

Chahda reached forward and switched off the jeep's headlights. For an instant it was very dark, then as Rick's eyes became adjusted to the darkness he saw that the road was visible as a white pathway between the

rice paddies. Ahead were the lights of houses. They had reached the barrio where the meeting was to be held.

Rick looked around and saw that the sky to the north was aglow with the lights of Manila. Then he saw a plane take off and realized that they were only a short distance from the airport.

Chahda pulled off the road into a patch of nipa palms, went through the palms, and parked behind a feathery thicket of bamboo. "We walk to shack," he said. He took a bolo from under the rear seat of the jeep and tucked it into his belt.

The Hindu boy led them a hundred yards down the road, then turned off onto a path. In a moment he pointed.

Ahead, alone in a clearing, was a typical nipa hut. It was built on stilts in the traditional Filipino way, and there was room underneath the supporting posts for a tall man to stand upright. The house itself was square, with walls of woven thatch made from the nipa palm. The roof was pyramidal, heavily thatched with layer after layer of straw. The floor was of split bamboo, a single layer of springy bamboo strips as wide as a man's thumb laid across a framing of whole bamboo supports.

Except that it allowed mosquitoes to roam in and out and gave no bar to lizards or snakes, it was ideal for the climate. The openwork floor allowed the breezes to circulate through the whole house. Also, housekeeping was simple. Dust couldn't gather. It just fell through the floor.

Filipinos had lived in houses like this for centuries, but the influence of Western civilization was visible in the form of electric lights. It was visible in another way at this particular nipa hut, too. Next to it was a shiny limousine, the property of Irineo Lazada.

Chahda whispered, "We get close. Be very quiet and follow me."

It was dark enough. Chahda led the way, and Rick and Scotty followed. There was little cover, but there was no guard outside the house. Apparently Lazada and Nast felt quite safe. They did not know how effectively Chahda had shadowed them.

Chahda made his way slowly until they were beside the big limousine. There was a murmur of voices from above, Lazada's predominating.

Rick swallowed hard as Chahda left the limousine and and walked right under the hut, but he and Scotty followed, scarcely daring to breathe. It was dark and he almost knocked over a stack of wooden boxes. Then, under the hut, there was light.

Rick had not realized that the bamboo floor was nothing more than a latticework of bamboo strips. He could look right up between them and see the occupants of the room!

There was Lazada, of course, and Nast. And with them were two Chinese.

Nast was talking. "Don't you worry about delivery. If I say I'll get the skull into Macao, I'll do it. You just worry about the price."

Rick recognized the name of Macao. It was the Portuguese colony on the Chinese coast just below Hong Kong. It had the reputation of being the gathering place for smugglers, gun-runners, Chinese river pirates, and equally unsavory folk.

One Chinese spoke in sibilant, accented English. "The price you ask is too much. The skull is worth its exact weight in gold, at fifty American dollars an ounce. What do we care if it is a very old native religious object? That has value only for an Ifugao, not a Chinese, and our customers are not Ifugaos."

Rick gasped. Lazada and Nast were intending to sell the skull just for the gold in it!

Lazada put his hand on a box that sat beside him on the floor. "The customers you have usually want bullion gold, true. But perhaps you have one very wealthy customer who could use a museum piece of great value."

"If we could have the skull legally, yes. But it is the only one of its kind. In a few days the press will have sent its description to every city in the world, because its loss is a good news story. No one in his right mind would buy such an object."

"I'm afraid he's right," Nast said. "We'll have to settle for its value in weight. But that's worth something."

Chahda pulled Rick's sleeve, then Scotty's. The boys followed him from under the house back to the edge of the clearing. He whispered, "See the box? I'm sure that is skull. Now, you feel brave?"

"What's your plan?" Scotty asked.

Chahda drew his bolo. "Bamboo cuts easy. Two swings and box falls into our hands. We run like wild men, they not catch."

Rick objected. "The skull is too heavy. We couldn't run with it easily. They'd catch whoever had it."

Scotty nodded. "And the box is too small for two people to get a good grip on it. We'd fall all over each other."

"Could be," Chahda agreed, but he was not convinced. He said that there must be some way to get the box.

Rick studied the house as though the sight of it might give him inspiration. The house didn't, but something else did. "The purloined letter!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Remember the story by Poe? No one found the letter because it was in the most obvious place—so obvious that no one looked." He whispered his daring plan.

Scotty chuckled. "I'll even forgive you for biting me in Baguio, for that one."

Chahda salaamed. "Mighty is the mind of Rick. I glad you on my side. Let's go."

They sneaked back to the house and made preparations for the audacious recovery of the box. Chahda tested the edge of his bolo, reached up with it, and measured the length of his stroke and where the blade would touch. It would work. He looked at the boys expectantly.

Rick knew that bamboo was remarkable stuff. It had great strength against nearly everything except a sharp blade applied across its grain. But it had to be cut cleanly. Also, Chahda would have to make two cuts before the box could drop through the floor. On the first cut, Lazada and Nast would be moving. They could make it down the stairs before the second cut was made.

He shook his head at Chahda. Not yet. He motioned to Scotty and together they examined the stairs, which ran down the outside of the framing. Scotty gestured toward the boxes stacked at one corner of the house. They examined them. The boxes were full of a special kind of sea shell used commercially in the Philippines. They were fairly heavy.

Working together, they piled a few boxes on the stairs. Anyone not watching his footing might fall over them.

Then Scotty motioned to a stack of bamboo poles just outside the house pilings. He whispered, "You help Chahda. I'll use one of these." He selected a long one about two inches in diameter and held it in both hands like a lance. With Scotty standing beside the stairs, the pole would reach almost through the door of the hut.

Scotty nodded. Rick stepped to a position beside Chahda and nodded.

Chahda flexed his muscles, wrapped his fingers tightly around the handle of his bolo, spread his feet and swung.

The steel blade hit the bamboo floor and sliced through, flying in a great arc.

There were yells from the men upstairs. Chahda swung again as running feet made the floor vibrate. Scotty gave a wild yell and charged like a knight attacking an enemy. The bamboo pole caught Nast in the stomach and drove him back into the hut.

The box containing the skull slid and caught.

Chahda swung again, in desperation, and the box dropped through! Rick caught it, and the weight would have driven him to the ground had not Chahda given a hand.

They rushed the box to its prearranged hiding place, then Rick gave a piercing whistle. They ran, all three of them, in three different directions.

Chahda headed for the jeep. He ran quietly. Scotty headed south, yelling as he went; Rick ran north, giving an occasional bellow. That was to draw the pursuit away from Chahda, so he could get to the jeep undisturbed.

The pursuit had organized, apparently, because both Nast and Lazada were barking orders. Rick kept yelling, but he was now in the brush. Scotty was yelling, too.

Rick pushed his way through the brush and emerged on the bank of a river or estuary of some kind. Beyond, on the opposite bank, were rows of wooden forms that marked the outline of salt pans. Water was let into the square pools in the early morning, and by nightfall it had evaporated, leaving its salt behind.

For a tense moment Rick waited. Perhaps he was not being followed. Perhaps they had followed Scotty. Then he heard the brush snapping and knew they were on his

trail. He had to keep going. He stepped into the water and went right on until it was over his head. He spluttered, his eyes stinging from the salt. The water was brine, already partially evaporated and ready for the salt pans.

A few strokes took him to the opposite bank. He climbed out onto the salt pans, his clothes dripping and his shoes soggy. He ran.

He was almost across the field of salt pans when a shot whistled past. He bent low and ran faster, remembering that Nast carried a .38 in a shoulder holster.

The second shot was closer, but not close enough. He reached the field beyond the salt pans and headed for a coconut grove about three hundred feet ahead. The field was covered with a low-growing vine of some sort. He floundered and tripped, then got to his feet again, looking back over his shoulder. Apparently the pursuers were looking for a way across the water. He couldn't see them.

He reached the shadow of the coconut grove and stopped, glad of a chance to wring out his clothes. He did so, a garment at a time, watching his trail. In a few moments he saw two men emerge from a far corner of the salt pans and start across. For a moment he turned to run, then an idea struck him and he grinned.

There was pretty complete darkness. He could see and be seen in the open. But under the palms he would be invisible from a distance of twenty yards. He need

not run; he could wait until the pursuit passed, then walk leisurely to the airport, get a cab, and go home. Chahda probably was already there. He thought he had heard the jeep engine start. Even if pursued, Chahda could get away all right. The jeep was faster than the limousine on rough roads.

Scotty's fate was less certain. If two men were after Rick, the other two probably were after Scotty. They had scattered just for the purpose of splitting the enemy forces, and to allow Chahda time to get the jeep underway.

As Rick watched, the two men reached the near edge of the salt pans. One produced a flashlight and they walked along the edge of the salt pans shining the light at the ground.

Rick wondered. Surely they weren't looking for footprints. Both the salt pans and the field were perfectly dry. He wasn't particularly afraid of the flashlight. He would wait until they were close to the palm grove, then move laterally away from them and lie flat on the ground. The light couldn't pick him out from any great distance.

The men walked slowly down the edge of the salt pans until they reached the place where Rick had left the pans and entered the field, then, as surely as bloodhounds, they followed the route he had taken.

He stared, amazed. How had they tracked him? Then, suddenly, he knew. Makahiya! The sensitive mimosa!

The field was covered with it. And where he had walked, the mimosa's leaves were rolled up tightly!

Rick turned and ran through the grove, trying to be silent. He used a beacon from nearby Manila Airport as a guide, and in a moment he saw red lights on the other side of the grove. It was the field. They were boundary lights.

He saw instantly that he was in a bad spot. The only way to go was straight ahead, across the open airport. He would be seen instantly when his pursuers emerged from the grove, and from then on it would be a foot race. There was nothing else to do but go on. He climbed over the airport fence and started for the lights of the administration building a mile away.

To conserve his strength and wind he kept his pace to a dogtrot. He crossed one paved strip and cast a look behind in time to see the pursuers climb the fence. A yell told him he had been seen. He started to zigzag, anticipating a bullet. His spine tingled and there was a crawling sensation between his shoulder blades. But when the shot did come it was such a wide miss that he did not even give an instinctive duck.

Somewhere down the line a big plane was getting ready to take off, the pilot was checking his magnetos, revving up his engines. He searched for lights as he ran and saw them over a mile down the field. It was a Stratocruiser, probably bound for America. Then he saw the runway ahead and realized that it would be a race to

see whether or not he got across before the plane reached that point. The lights told him that the plane was already moving. He lengthened his stride.

He had a choice. He could stop and wait until the big plane passed, or he could run for it and hope to beat it. If he stopped, it would give his pursuers a chance to catch up.

He ran faster, still breathing easily. But there were signs that his wind was giving out. He cast anxious glances down the field. The big plane was rolling, its engines roaring. He tried to gauge the point where it would be air-borne, but it was too hard. It should be in the air by the time it reached him, but he couldn't be sure. The runway was only yards ahead now. He sprinted.

The plane roared down at him. Then he was on the runway, realizing that he would not be across in time. In sudden terror he threw himself flat, just as the big plane lifted. The wheels were only a few feet above him as it passed over.

Then he was on his feet, running again, weak from the certainty of a moment ago that he was done for. But the administration building was only a short distance away now, and he found the strength to keep going. He ran past astonished airport personnel, made his way through the crowd that had come to see the flight off, and leaped into a taxi just ahead of the Filipino gentleman who was about to enter.

"Get going!" he panted. "Hurry!" The driver responded with a burst of speed that snapped Rick back against the cushions. He turned and watched through the rear window, but he couldn't see his pursuers. He had made it!

CHAPTER XX

Surprise Package

COLONEL Felix Rojas fingered the eagle on one shoulder. "It took me thirty years to become a colonel," he said. "If you are wrong, Colonel Rojas will be Private Rojas by morning. You know that?"

"If Lazada is at home," Rick repeated, "it will mean that he hasn't found the golden skull. If he is not at at home, and doesn't come home, it will mean that he has it."

"You need not worry, Sahib Colonel. Rick has plenty bright idea. Lazada will not find that skull, believe me," Chahda assured him.

Chahda and Scotty had beaten Rick to the hotel, and had found both Rojas and Tony Briotti waiting as a result of the messages the boys had left. Chahda had gotten away easily, and he had lingered in Parañaque, parked in shadow, until he saw Scotty go by. Then he had picked him up. When Rick did not appear, they went to the hotel to wait for word.

Scotty had ditched his pursuers easily by climbing a mango tree and waiting until they passed. He was more at home in the woods at night than any of them, including Chahda.

Tony Briotti asked, "Does your father know what kind of chances you take, Rick?"

Rick grinned. "He's been along on a few expeditions, remember. He knows we can take care of ourselves."

"So do I, now. Colonel, I have faith in the boys' theory. I think we had better go to Lazada's."

Rojas nodded. "Even if it means being broken, the chance is worth it to hang something on that man. Our republic is young. It cannot tolerate men like him in public office. Without proof we cannot touch him, but if the proof is there . . ."

"It will be," Rick said confidently.

Rojas picked up the phone and asked for a number. He got his connection, gave his name, and asked for Captain Lichauco. To the captain he gave orders. A platoon was to meet him at Lazada's in fifteen minutes. No earlier and no later. Then he phoned Dr. Okola and requested that he, also, be at Lazada's.

"Now," Colonel Rojas said to the Spindrift group, "let us go."

Ten minutes later they got out of the colonel's car in front of Lazada's house. A Sikh guard started to open the door for them, but Chahda stopped him and spoke rapidly in Hindi. The guard replied.

"He here, also car," Chahda said.

Colonel Rojas consulted his watch. "We'll wait here."

The minutes ticked by in silence until the headlights of a truck appeared. The truck pulled up and a young captain got out of the front seat. He saluted. Rojas gave his crisp orders in Tagolog, which the captain relayed to the men on the truck. They climbed down with a minimum of noise and went to surround the house.

"Now," Rojas said, "let us visit Mr. Lazada."

He pushed open the door and marched up the front stairs, the Spindrift group close behind. At the top of the stairs the constabulary colonel brushed aside a houseboy and strode into the living room where Lazada sat with Nast. The two leaped to their feet.

Lazada turned red. "What is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

Colonel Rojas bowed. "I regret to inform you that you are under arrest on charges of grand larceny, attempting to sell gold illegally, and conspiracy to smuggle gold out of the country."

Lazada snarled. "I'll have you broken for this, you fool! I don't know what you're talking about."

"I think you do. These American gentlemen have told me quite a story."

"I'm sure of it. And whose word do you take? That of your countryman and senior official, or the word of these foreign adventurers?"

"Theirs," Rojas said. "I will accept from you the cus-

tody of a certain golden skull, stolen by you from the Ifugaos."

Lazada had recovered his composure. He chuckled. "I have no golden skull. You are free to search, even without a warrant, Colonel."

"Thank you. Please lead the way to your garage."

"Certainly, but you will find nothing there but my car."

Lazada led the way to the back of the house and down a flight of stairs to a garage. If the sight of constabulary troopers with ready carbines bothered him, he didn't show it. But Nast, obviously, was worried. He kept casting glances at the boys.

"Better give the colonel that shoulder gun you missed me with earlier tonight," Rick told him. "You might hurt yourself with it."

Colonel Rojas held out his hand. "Give."

Nast did.

In the garage was the limousine. Lazada waved at it. "As I told you, nothing here but my car."

"And a golden skull," Rick said. He opened the trunk and reached in for the box!

Lazada screamed with sudden fear and rage. He leaped for Rick. He met Scotty's fist and sat down, hard.

Colonel Rojas had been sweating profusely. Now, at the sight of the golden skull, he took out his handkerchief, wiped his face, and smiled contentedly. "We'll need a new Assistant Secretary now," he said happily.

"And we'll ship Mr. Nast back to America as an undesirable alien. The authorities there will take him into custody."

"Have you found it? Where is the skull?" someone called.

Dr. Okola came running up the driveway, and with him, in immaculate white linens, was Nangolat!

The group sat in Dr. Okola's office at the museum. Outside, constabulary troopers were on guard. Inside, a fabulous collection of golden and silver artifacts, dominated by the golden skull, received the admiring attention of the Spindrift group, Colonel Rojas, Angel Manotok, and Dr. Okola, with Nangolat as lecturer.

When he had finished describing the various objects and their uses, the Ifugao said, "And now, I must explain. I am here because I gave myself up to Dr. Okola. He, in turn, will hand me to the police. I asked only that I be permitted to examine the treasures."

Tony Briotti shook his head. "I don't understand. You're intelligent, well-educated, and well on the road to becoming a scientist. Why did you do it?"

Nangolat's broad face was sad but composed. "How can I explain? I almost killed my good friend Angel. I attacked innocent American scientists who had no evil intentions toward my people. I goaded the young men of Banaue into war against the wishes of their elders. It is only because my gods watched over me that I do not

have your blood on my hands. But how can I explain?"

His dark eyes pleaded for understanding. "You cannot know what it is to an Ifugao or an Igorot. In America you respect your primitives—your Indians. But here, we are just aborigines—primitive animals, eaters of dog. We are sneered at and despised. To Americans we are curiosities. We wear breechcloths and funny hats that we use for pockets."

"Nangolat!" Dr. Okola exclaimed. "I never suspected that you felt like that. I thought we had always treated you as we did any other student."

"You were the ones who treated me as a man," Nangolat admitted. "You and Angel. But when I worked with you in tracing down the golden skull and what it meant to my people, something happened. The more we learned, the more I resented the attitudes of the others, those who despise the Ifugao as a dog-eating animal. I believed that in the golden skull we had the proof that the Ifugaos were better than any of you, that our civilization was older. I lost my civilization. I forgot my friends. I could only think that here was proof of the greatness of the Ifugao, and that the Americans were coming to take it away."

"But we said that the artifacts would remain here," Tony Briotti reminded him. "We told Dr. Okola that we would not ask permission to take them out of the country."

"Yes, but I was worried. I went to Lazada, to plead

with him to forbid you to take them under any circumstances, and he told me that he was helpless, officially. He said that the American Government would insist on getting the treasures of my people, and that our own government would have to yield because we need American financial aid."

"Of all the rotten lies!" Rick exclaimed angrily.

"Yes. But he was an official of our government and I believed him. Then he goaded me. He said that only an Ifugao would allow such a thing to happen, because the Ifugaos were less than men. Men would protect their treasures. I was emotionally upset already. His goading drove me berserk. I was truly mad. So, I acted as I did."

"Tell them what happened at Banaue," Okola said gently.

"Dr. Briotti convinced me that he was not trying to steal our treasure. That is, he almost convinced me, and he did convince our priests. But Lazada came, and he said the American ambassador was already demanding custody of the treasure as soon as it was found. You know what happened then."

"We sure do," Scotty said.

"Then the jeep got away, and later the plane came. We did not keep attacking, because many of our young men had lost heart. They couldn't see the sense of rushing into the muzzles of your rifles over some treasure they knew nothing about. I had worked them up to the point of attacking once, but I could not do it again.

Then the plane dropped the sack. We did not know what was in it, except that it must be part of the treasure. Lazada carried it to his car. I followed and demanded the bag. He said he had no bag, although it was in plain sight. He was smiling. He said the plane got all the bags; he didn't have any. I saw at once what he was doing. He was going to take the bag and pretend that he had never seen it, and it would be the word of a group of poor Ifugao natives against the word of a great official. I saw red. I reached for him, and Nast struck me with his gun."

Nangolat rubbed his head. "He knocked me out, and he knocked sense into me. I walked to Bontoc and took the bus south. Now I am ready to be punished."

Rick was deeply touched by Nangolat's recital. He remembered how favorably impressed they had been that first day, when they thought he was Angel. "Speaking for myself," he offered, "I am grateful to Nangolat for a warm reception at Banaue, and for an interesting visit to the rice terraces."

Scotty took the cue. "As for me, I haven't had so much fun in a fight since that free-for-all at Canton Charlie's in Hong Kong."

Chahda bowed. "I also represent ancient Asia people. Very grateful to Nangolat for fine demonstration of how Ifugaos fight. Very different from Hindu method."

The three boys looked at Tony. He had suffered the

most at Nangolat's hands. Nangolat had tried to kill him, then had kidnaped him, and had intended to take his head.

Tony smiled. "And I am grateful to Nangolat for personally conducting me to Banaue and for putting on such an interesting series of rituals and dances."

Angel Manotok went to Nangolat and took his hand. "Can a Filipino be less of a friend than an American? It was too bad I fell on my head and almost fractured my skull. How nice it was of you, Nangolat, to pretend to be me so I would not lose face with the Americans by not appearing to work for them."

There were tears in the Ifugao's eyes. "What a magnificent group of storytellers you are!"

Colonel Rojas grinned. "Sounded like the truth to me, Nangolat. And if anyone wants to know what kind of men the Ifugaos are, send them to me. I led Mountain Province warriors against the Japanese. They attacked tanks barehanded. They fought like fiends. They made me proud to be a Filipino."

Tony Briotti picked up the golden skull. "We have a lot of work to do, Nangolat. We'll need your help. And all of us will have to testify against Lazada."

"Golly, that's right," Rick said. "What a nuisance that will be. We'll have to wait around for weeks."

"Not that long," Colonel Rojas promised. "This is one case that will be tried in a hurry. But you will have to

stay a while. You will my guests. There's a lot of the Philippines you haven't seen. We might even be able to stir up a little excitement for you."

"No, thanks," Rick said.

"Sorry," Chahda said.

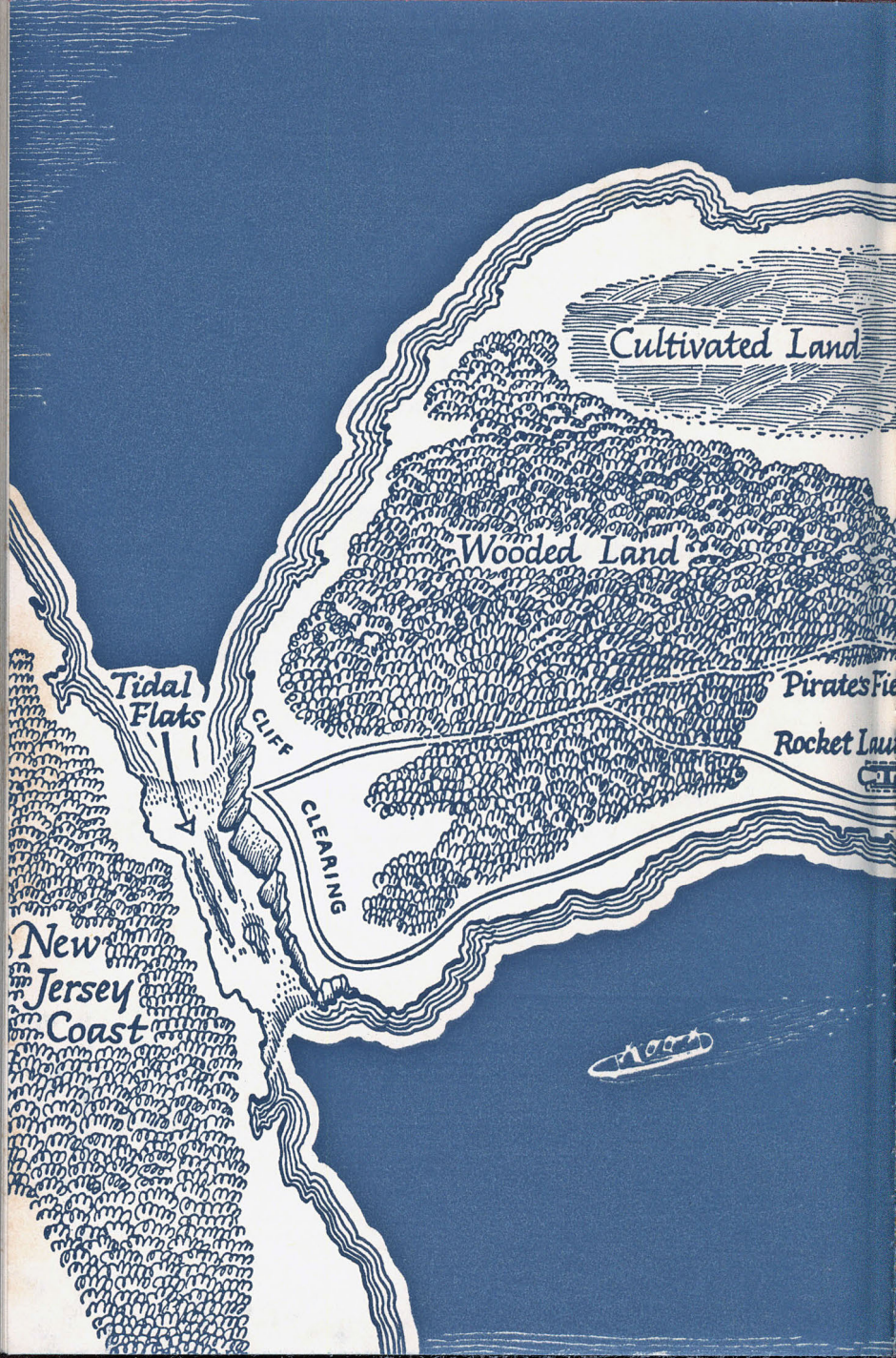
"Need peace and quiet," Scotty said.

Tony laughed. "Don't believe them. They may stay quiet until tomorrow, but I doubt it. What do you have in mind?"

"I'd like to take them to Mindoro Island, south of here, to hunt timarau. In case you don't know, those are water buffalo. They rate as the most dangerous game animal in Asia."

"Too exciting for me," Rick said.

But in later years when the Ifugao expedition was mentioned, Rick, Scotty, and Chahda always talked much more about the hunting on Mindoro than they did about their encounter with the Ifugaos. And they were prouder of the timarau heads in the study than of the Ifugao spears that had been thrown at them and brought back by Angel as souvenirs.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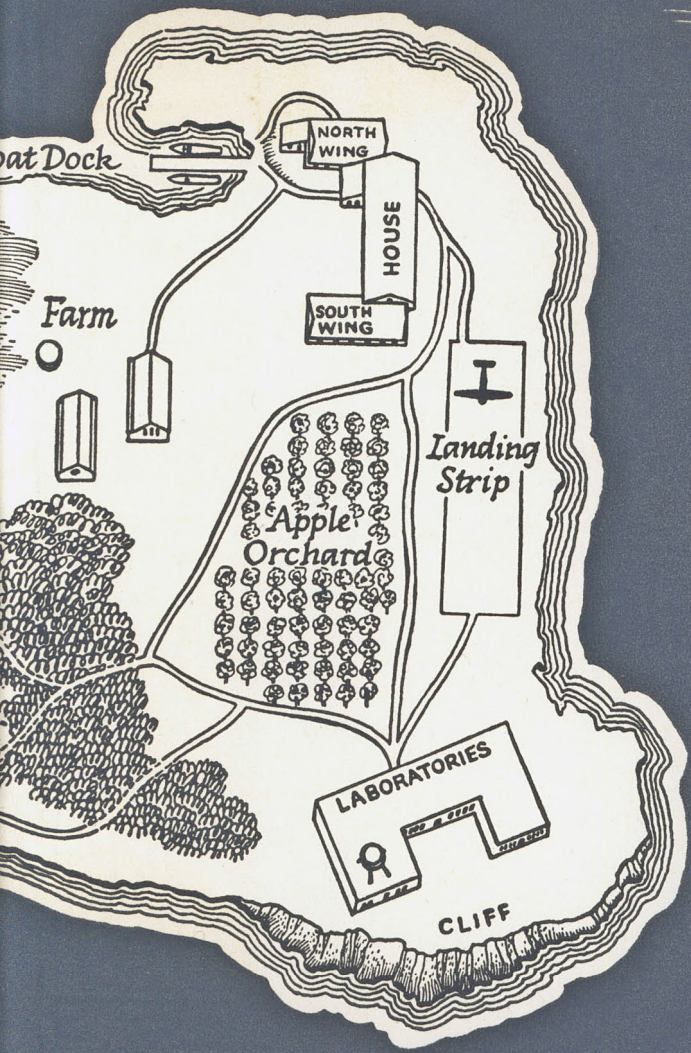

SPINDRIFT ISLAND